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Calculated Chance

'Process art is chance, contingency and indetermination'
Robert Morris

There are many ways to approach 'chance', be it on a philosophical, a mathematical or artistic level. Common to all of them is a certain level of unpredictability and uncertainty which brings into its definition the realm of probabilities. Chance is about something to come, a process or something unknown to happen.

In the past century artists have developed various methods and processes to trigger chance. Beginning largely with the DADA movement in the late 1910s, artists have incorporated elements of chance in the creation and presentation of their work. This development is thought to have been inspired by a loss of faith in ordered Western civilization in the wake of World War I, as well by the development of relativist principles in fields ranging from quantum physics to psychology to Eastern philosophy. Jean Arp composed collages by dropping shapes at random while Marcel Duchamp recorded the patterns formed by dropped strings; both reduced the status of the artist's conscious decisions in creating an artwork.

'I set the rules but led chance exceed intent'
John Cage

Since then chance operations have become a recurrent technique, strategy and reflection in art; from automatic writing in abstract art to performative and process-oriented rules in FLUXUS or conditional statements in conceptual art. Stochastic principles entered in artistic explorations in early computational works.

Based on these considerations many contemporary artists use chance without losing control, trying to master, direct or even stage chance. It is precisely this interplay between control and the unforeseen, the planned and the surprise that the exhibition deliberately explores.

The exhibition stages works by artists who let go control and let in chance while exploring operations of probability, combinatory, contingency and serendipity.

Calculated Chance

'L'art processuel est le hasard, la contingence et l'indétermination'
Robert Morris

Il existe de nombreuses manières d'approcher le 'hasard', que ce soit au niveau philosophique, mathématique ou artistique. Un point commun à tous est un certain niveau d'imprévisibilité et d'incertitude qui introduit dans sa définition le domaine des probabilités. Le 'possible' que ce soit dans un sens positif, la chance ou l'indétermination, l'aléatoire, met en jeu un autre dénominateur: le hasard est quelque chose à venir, un processus ou quelque chose qui se produit de manière indéfinie, inconnue à l'avance.

Débutant en grande partie dans le cadre du mouvement DADA à la fin des années 1910, les artistes ont incorporé des éléments de hasard dans la création et la présentation de leurs œuvres. Il est pensé que ce développement a été inspiré par une perte de confiance dans la civilisation occidentale après la Première Guerre mondiale, ainsi que par le développement de principes relativistes dans les domaines allant de la physique quantique à la philosophie orientale. Jean Arp a composé des collages en déposant les formes au hasard, tandis que Marcel Duchamp a enregistré les motifs formés par les cordes déposés au hasard; les deux artistes ont diminué le statut des décisions conscientes dans le processus de la création de l'œuvre d'art.

'J'ai établi les règles, mais conduit le hasard à dépasser l'intention'
John Cage

Depuis lors, le recours aux opérations faisant intervenir le hasard est devenu une technique récurrente, une stratégie est une réflexion dans l'art moderne et contemporain; de l'écriture automatique dans l'art abstrait aux règles performatifs et processuels dans le FLUXUS ou encore les instructions conditionnelles dans l'art conceptuel. Les principes stochastiques entrent au plus tard dans les explorations artistiques dans le cadre des premières œuvres computationnelles.

L'exposition met en scène les œuvres des artistes qui laissent tomber le contrôle et laissent entrer le hasard tout en explorant les opérations de probabilité, de combinatoire, de contingence et de sérendipité.

Calculated Chance

'Proces kunst is kans, iets wat onvoorzien en onbepaald is.'
Robert Morris

Er zijn veel manieren om 'kans' te benaderen, zij het op filosofisch, wiskundig of artistiek vlak. Eén ding hebben ze allemaal gemeen, en dat is een bepaalde mate van onvoorspelbaarheid en onzekerheid. Dit brengt de dimensie van probabiliteit in zijn definitie en incorporeert een potentieel: een ongedefinieerd, ongekend (en onbemind) toeval dat iets staat te gebeuren dat van tevoren nog niet bekend was.

Beginnend grotendeels met de DADA-beweging in de late jaren 1910, hebben kunstenaars elementen van 'kans' verwerkt in de creatie en presentatie van hun werk. Deze ontwikkeling was vermoedelijk ingegeven door een verlies van vertrouwen in de geordende westerse beschaving in de nasleep van de Eerste Wereldoorlog enerzijds, en de ontwikkeling van relativistische principes binnen de kwantumfysica en filosofie anderzijds. Jean Arp maakte collages door willekeurige vormen te laten vallen, terwijl Marcel Duchamp het motief gevormd door het vallen van koorden vastlegde; beide namen afstand van bewuste beslissingen in het creatieproces.

'Ik heb de regels bepaald, maar laat de kans de intentie overschrijden.'
John Cage

Sindsdien zijn toevallige operaties een terugkerende techniek, strategie en reflectie in moderne en hedendaagse kunst geworden: van automatisch schrijven in abstracte kunst tot performatieve en procesgeoriënteerde regels in FLUXUS of conditionele uitspraken in conceptuele kunst. Stochastische principes deden hun intrede in de vroege computerkunst.

Heel wat hedendaagse kunstenaars gebruik van 'kans' zonder de controle te verliezen, het proberen te beheersen, te sturen of zelfs een kans te geven. Het is precies dit samenspel tussen controle en het ongecontroleerde, het geplande en het ongeplande dat de tentoonstelling verkent.

De tentoonstelling onderzoekt hoe kunstenaars controle loslaten en kans toelaten, door het onderzoeken van probabiliteit en serendipiteit.

Fortunate Loss
2016

Courtesy: Olivier & Nicole Gevart Collection, Brussels

'On Tuesday, the 19th of January 2016, we have won a set of seven lots bearing the numbers 40, 139,160, 198, 529, 555 and 574, at the auction 'History & Game', organized by the 'Millon & Associates' auction house in Paris. The antiquarian printed matter on which we decided to bid all relate to the theme of games of chance and gambling. Each lot — one of which has been replaced by a copy of our own making — has then been wrapped in a black opaque plastic, before being put back into play, on the occasion of a gallery show. The selling price of each work was calculated in relation to the hammer price of the lot it contains. Invisible for the spectator and a potential buyer the content remains hidden and sealed. The description of the lot, cut out from the auction's catalogue, is only revealed against payment.'
Eva Barto

The artists set up a game to buy a pig in a poke or to get the fortunate loss, by initiating mechanism of the art market they issue the value of art.

Bennequin, Jérémie

Le hasard n'abolira jamais un coup de dés
2014

Courtesy: Private Collection

More than a hundred years after its first publication, Stéphane Mallarmé's poem 'Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard' remains a source of inspiration as it is a continuous subject of mathematical investigation and philosophical interrogation. For many artists, it is a starting point to question the relationship between chance and control, between hidden rules and pure randomness, between the interplay of semantics and visual, geometric or spatial structures.

Bennequin's artist's book presents one of those investigations revealing a hidden dimension of Mallarmé's poem. So far no one seems to have noticed that its reading has proved to be mysteriously reversible. It is indeed possible to read the poem backwards. In Bennequin's book, the verses are strangely reversed inviting the reader to turn the book around and to discover its new meaning. Likewise, Bennequin is using the principle of Mallarmé's visual poetry inducing through the visual and spatial display of the words a different, a new form of reading and understanding.

The gesture of turning the book around by which Bennequin himself discovered the reversibility of Mallarmé's poem, happened one day by accident when looking from upside down to Marcel Broodthaers' famous appropriation of the poem. Broodthaers' substitution of the words by black rectangles reveals the geometric pattern, the visual structure of the poem, a process which he underlines in the book's subtitle when replacing the word 'poem' by the word 'image'.

Bennequin pays tribute to Broodthaers homage to Mallarmé replacing on his turn the subtitle by the word 'omage': This 'gommage' (French for scrubbing) points towards the artist own practice issuing artistic concerns through literature.

Closky, Claude

Chinese Lotto Bulletin
2005

Courtesy of the Artist

The Lotto Cards triggers our belief in luck driven by our desire of prosperity which, seen from a mathematical point of view, on a level of probability, is a complete irrational belief. Claude Closky plays on this ambiguity when filling in lotto cards systematically with geometric patterns.

It's enough to look at the work to see the absurdity of such an approach - or so it seems. The fact is that Closky does not violate any rules and, more importantly, there is no reason to believe that his 'system' is less (or more) successful than others. If you immediately tell yourself that this cannot be the cards of a serious player you involuntarily buy into the logic of irrational beliefs.

The truth is: it does not matter if the numbers are dreamt of, correspond to dates with a personal meaning or follows artistic convictions – the chance that you lose or win is the same. The belief that certain numbers have a higher chance of winning cannot be rationally justified - and therefore any system you use is as good as any other. As such the work reveals an aspect of the inherent logic of irrationality.

All combinations of a three digit padlock
1989

Courtesy of the Artist

The artwork lists all 1000 possible combinations of three digit padlock framing the chance to open the lock by pure chance or by systematic exploration. This simple principle of mapping and quantifying the possibilities puts in dialogue the two major aspects of luck oscillating between randomness and probability.

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de Tscharner, David

Bonds
2019

Courtesy of the Artist

The Swiss sculptor David de Tscharner uses elements such as time constraints, geographical information, and spectator manipulation and appropriation to augment the materials he manipulates. He transforms the sculpture into a catalyst, creating a link between intimacy and social experience. For several years, the artist has been developing combinatorial sculptures whose final form is never defined in advance, delegating this responsibility to chance, to the public, to the curator, to the collector...

Seen David's sensitivity for serendipity, Société invited the artist to create a new work for the exhibition centred on 'calculation' and 'chance'. Conceived as a sculptural take on the abacus, the artwork combines the notions of 'play' and 'contemplation'.

'Bonds' is composed of moulded polyurethane spheres containing 6 holes and pine sticks of 6 different lengths. Through a series of rolls of the dice by the curators of the exhibition Manuel Abendroth and Els Vermang, the two types of elements connect. Each number thrown first corresponds to the number of holes operated within a sphere, then to their orientation and finally to the length of each connected stick. Oscillating between construction game, molecular structure or utopian architecture, David de Tscharner leaves the field free to interpretation and imagination.

de Vries, Herman

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Random Shapes
1975

Courtesy: Private Collection

The folded card folio contains 10 loose leaf cardboard pieces, random in shape. The multiple was produced to accompany the exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum that ran between February 7th and April 6th,1975. For much of this decade, the museum produced artist books instead of catalogues.

The paper shapes are intended to be manipulated by a person offering an infinite number of arrangements. With this simple principle, de Vries expresses one of his major artistic concerns, what he called: 'random objectivations'. By combing the objective principle of a rule with randomness he creates the setting for a wide range of compositions of shapes, colours and objects. As such, each obtained arrangement is just one in a field of possibilities. In order to calculate and to evaluate these 'chance fields' in accordance to probability, he uses from the very beginning of his career the computer.

In an essay on the 'topology of randomness' he writes: 'In fact, it is more an essay on the endlessness of chance, numbers that are calculated for the amount of possibilities.' As an artist, scientist, philosopher and poet he believes that 'existence' depends on the relation between change and chance. Change creates possibilities of chance; chance creates possibilities of change. Nothing is permanent.

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Donnachie, Karen Ann & Simionato, Andy

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athrowofthedicewillneverabolishchance.com
2015

Courtesy of the Artists

The netart project is driven by an artistic investigation of chance drawing a line between Mallarmé's eponymous poem / book from 1897 and recent machine logics.

Mallarmé's poem's most distinctive visual feature is its radical departure from typographic and grammatical conventions to a system of symbols which are based on an internal combinatorial logic. When building their 'Mallarmé-machine' the Australian artists Donnachie & Simionato easily could have used random number generators to process a similar spatial distribution and choice of words. But such functioning most likely would have led to the problem that the machine-generated version could be mistaken for the original. Therefore the artists have been exploring another track using Google's reCaptcha program to self-replicate the elements of the poem.

Google's reCAPTCHA, was launched in 2009 to assist in the company's attempt at digitizing every book in the world. But when optical character recognition fails to find a match in a scanned text from a book an image of this word is farmed out to human readers '… *enlisting humans to decipher the words that computers cannot recognize'* - hence it's popular use in human / machine security verification.

Somehow Google appears to be taking Mallarmé's often cited statement, that *'the world exists to end up in a book'*, one step further. Google's attempt at creating a 'universal book' suggests that *'the world exists to end up teaching an artificial intelligence'*.

By using this flow of image / words the artist's website offers a unique, randomized combination of reCAPTCHAs arranged with the same way as Mallarmé's 'Un Coup de Dés'. The tension of the project lies in this relationship between the human ability to decipher the words and their possible interpretation, and the project being poetry for non-human readers, a search for meaning by the kinds of Artificial Intelligence programs currently in development by corporations such as Google.

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Filliou, Robert

Eins. Un. One.
1984

Courtesy: MAMCO, Musée d'Art Contemporain et Moderne, Geneva

'Eins. Un. One ... can be realized, is realised and will be realised without any restriction of form and combinations of forms even the most diverse. A random roll of thousands of dices on a flat surface in the hope that at least the furtive impression of the interpenetration and identity of the entire cosmos is suggested.'
Robert Filliou

The installation uses 16000 blue, red, yellow, black and white dice of different sizes presenting one single dot on all their six sides. Erasing five of a dice regularly displayed numbers in favour of a single one, is the negation of probability or the overturn of stochastic reasoning - both essential notions in the definition of luck. But the notion of chance is reintroduced upon activation of the installation: The field of dice, its spread and shape, is the result of 'rolling' the 16000 dice at the same time, a gesture operated from a single point and height in space.

As such, each presentation of the work brings a performative aspect into play and introduces the notions of time and chance, where the process is dominant to the final form. By addressing in the perception of the artwork to a semantic level Filliou's work not only recalls principles of conceptual art but also relay in its restitution on a 'score', a method well known from FLUXUS artists where he was one of its major members.

François, Michel

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Instant Gratification
2013

Courtesy of The Artist

Michel François has never limited himself to one medium but uses all kinds of materials combining industrial and natural objects, photos, videos, sculptures and installations. He is interested in 'the signs of life' even the tiniest ones, be it gestures, sounds, images or everyday customs and habits. He defines himself as a sculptor giving objects a place in space but his work mostly relies on a process and includes experiment, to no end.

'The lace-like bronze wall sculpture 'Instant Gratifications' is the result of a thermic shock, provoked by the confrontation of burning hot liquid bronze being poured onto a cold floor. By diverting centuries-old techniques, Michel François obtains new forms and new meanings. The work also refers to fortune tellers that use the same procedure to predict the future on the basis of the pattern obtained.'
Source: Xavier Hufkens website

This old fortune-telling technique has spread into different cultures and is popular practice still today. The technique to drop small molten lead or tin pieces into cold water and the divination of their shape hence meaning, is known as 'Molybdomancy'. For example in Germany the traditional 'Bleigießen' is held during New Year's celebrations to predict the fortune of the upcoming year. As such the work of François offers different readings; the one of sculpture being a gesture, a process frozen in time and the one of a multi-semiosis on which the spectators divination is based.

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Hugonnier, Marine

New York Times from the series Art for Modern Architecture
(Homage to Ellsworth Kelly)
2009

Courtesy: Frédéric de Goldschmidt Collection, Brussels

Working primarily in film and photography, Marine Hugonnier's works questions the relationship between language and image by deconstructing conventions of representation.

For example, Hugonnier performs surgery on front pages of newspapers from significant moments in history, marking the death of Kennedy or the fall of the Berlin Wall. These events are associated with iconic photographs that Hugonnier has reduced to simple colours of the standard Kodak colour chart (cyan, green, yellow, red, magenta, black). Even if the text is kept intact the missing image breaks the narrative structure.

In the series 'Art for Modern Architecture', she follows a similar process using cut-outs from Ellsworth Kelly's 1951 book 'Line Form Color'. Kelly claimed that art was to be made for public spaces and buildings, thus serving the modernist utilitarian purpose. With her series, Hugonnier investigates Kelly's ideas and develop them within another medium, the one of a newspaper.

Her method recalls Marcel Broodthaers' homage to Mallarmé's poem 'Un coup de dés' where he covers the words of the poem by black colour blocks. By rendering the language of the poem illegible he draws importance of the relative positions of the words and sentences on the pages, the composition, over their semantic meanings. He turns the book to an object to be seen and not to be read. Hugonnier at her turn, has made a homage to Mallarmé disrupting the poem's original topography of the words with images.

Janowski, Christian

Telemistica
1999

Courtesy of The Artist

Christian Jankowski is a German artist which video installation and role-plays deal with the relationship between the artists, the art institutions, the media and society. He expresses his concern in playful, humorous work that comments on the contemporary art world. Like the social world, it too is ruled by entertainment. Jankowski constantly juggles with standards of reality. In three of his videos he works out a strategy to personally infiltrate television, a populist medium which is almost alien to art. In 'Telemistica' he telephones television fortune-tellers, a popular phenomenon in Italy, to have his future of being a successful artist predicted during a live television broadcast.

JODI

In 1924, Tristan Tzara instructed his readers how to make a Dadaist poem by cutting out the words of a newspaper article, putting the paper snippets in a bag, mixing them and gluing them on paper in the same order they have been drawn from the bag. While the resulting poem is random, the instruction is not. It generates Dadaist language, but the words used are not Dadaist.

Drawing reference to Tzara when introducing JODI's work points out a kind of Dadaist style but much more important, it allows to frame their relationship between chance and control and their bound to language. JODI, a net art group consisting of Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans, started since the mid 1990's to create artworks for the World Wide Web where the usual setup of webpages is deconstructed.

When entering oss.jodi.org immediately the website causes fluttering browser windows to rapidly open all over your screen, each of them triggering automatic downloads that duplicate this process every few seconds - a process that goes on and on besides your browser crashes. The text files behind the windows are random combinations of the program's source code. Even if their projects are built on code, rules, it's this chaotic imagery which has become JODI's trademark - what they call 'code poetry'.

While chance poetry of Cage and FLUXUS used disturbance and randomness as means of radical freedom, JODI, in a similar way as Mallarmé, rather plays on the possibilities and specificities of a media to deliver meaning, so to say, what is possible through a printed poem or a machine one.

Kelly, Ellsworth

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The Mallarmé Suite of 11 Lithographs
1992

Courtesy: Private Collection

'I think what we all want from art is a sense of fixity, a sense of opposing the chaos of daily living. This is an illusion, of course. Canvas rots. Paint changes colour. But you keep trying to freeze the world as if you could make it last forever. In a sense, what I've tried to capture is the reality of flux, to keep art an open, incomplete situation, to get at the rapture of seeing.'
Ellsworth Kelly

Ellsworth Kelly's 'Spectrum Colours Arranged by Chance' is one of the first abstract works he produced in the beginning of the 50-ies. A series of eight collages made up of hundreds of coloured squares randomly placed on a white or black background. The series was the product of a mathematical system: numbered slips of paper referred each to one of eighteen different hues to be placed on a grid. He opted for coloured squares, organized randomly along grid lines, since they refer to nothing but themselves. When applying chance, they can never be arranged in the same manner again. They transform into a unique object unto itself.

During his entire career, he continued to explore chance operations in his artistic practice. It is therefore not surprising that in 1992 he followed an invitation by the New York Limited Editions Club to create by the means of 11 lithographs his proper homage to Stéphane Mallarmés' poem 'Un coup de dés'. This enigmatic chance poem gains much of its power from its visual appearance.

The poem structure acts on one level of vision, in that it directs the eye from page to page, top to bottom and across. Such topographies become further abstracted when Ellsworth Kelly revisits the spatial balance of the poem by filling the pages with large graphic blocks of black ink. Kelly's flat monochromatic panels suggest a contradictory space where all semantic meaning is both: lost (a void) and possible (a well of ink). By challenging the viewer's perception and perceptiveness Kelly's prints inhabit the architecture of the poem.

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Germany's national newspaper Die Welt commissioned Ellsworth Kelly a project for its October 6, 2011 issue. The artist responded by replacing every photo of the newspaper with a silhouette of one of his artworks. From the first page to the last, Kelly's forms were the only illustrations for that day's entire print run.

One could argue that Marine Hugonnier's series 'Art for Modern Architecture' of 2003 pursuit a similar idea. A series where Hugonnier uses Kelly's illustration from his book 'line colour shape' to replace frontage photos of New York Times and other newspapers. But the project of Kelly for the Die Welt may best approached as a ping pong issuing appropriation and re-appropriation on an artistic but also media level.

With a daily circulation of over 200000 examplars Die Welt is one of Germany's most widely read dailies, which allows Kelly to position his idea entirely in the public sphere, beyond any artistic frame. As such he realise his ambition that art was to be made for public spaces and buildings.

LAb[au]

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Good Luck
2019

Courtesy of the Artist

The project deals with the difference between 'chance' and 'luck'; between its probabilistic dimension and its symbolic understanding.

The artwork is composed of a clover field inviting the spectator to contemplate its chance of finding a 4-leafed exemplar, and its expectation attributed to this chance. Given its small size, clover, and especially four-leafed clover, is a symbol of happiness. The chance of finding one in nature is statistically evaluated as 1 to 10,000. As such the artwork confronts the possible with the probable, tracing dialectics between rationalism and superstition.

In Christian symbolism, the four-leaf originally represents the cross and the four Gospels. But throughout the time it has become a sign of luck not only due to its rarity, but also due to its vigorous vital growth. Legend tells when Eva was driven out of paradise, she took a four-leaf clover which since then symbolically embodies a piece of paradise. In 1640, John Melton satirizes the superstition of the four-leaf clover in his satire Astrologaster, marking the first written proof of four-leaf clover as a symbol for luck.

Consequently, the artwork incorporates the opposition of an agnostic conviction with a romantic imagination. The opposition between these two is further actualized by exhibiting a field of Trifolium Pentaphyllum; a genetically engineered variation of the commonly found Trifolium Repens, which has been developed for commercial purposes. By doing so, the artwork points out the tension between manipulation and imagination.

In a universe where everything is possible, we still need a spark.

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Lacomblez, Sébastien

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Conus Textile
2017

Courtesy of the Artist

Conus textile is the Latin name of a species of shellfish found in the Indian and Pacific Ocean. This apparently harmless cone inhabits actually one of the animals with the most powerful toxins in the world. However, it is not this characteristic that triggered the interest of the artist, but the patterns present on its shells. They are generated by mechanisms similar to the cellular automata. Each cell generates pigments according to the secretion (or absence of secretion) of its neighbours, a simple rule but producing a complex, ever different, pattern of the shell as it grows.

The encounter with this shell - whose patterns resemble computer generated drawings - serves as a starting point to explore the links between generative processes and tapestry. As such the project inscribes in the artist conviction to overcome the dichotomy between so-called natural objects and artifacts.

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Mallarmé, Stéphane

Un Coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hasard
1887

Courtesy: Private Collection

'Mallarmé is at the source of modern art. (…) He unwittingly invented modern space. Mallarmé's poem proposed to liberate language from conventions of space and typography by stretching sentences across spreads and using multiple typefaces to abstract both form and content.'
Marcel Broodthaers

'A roll of the dice will never abolish chance' was first published in 1887. Not only it has been of far reaching influence within plastic arts - it is a mile stone in concrete poetry. In the poem, the actual layout of the words across and down the page becomes its primary component. At the same time, the poem seeks to embody what Mallarmé called 'subjects of pure and complex imagination or intellect' rather than passions and dreams, which he saw as the traditional subjects of verse.

'Un Coup de Dés' is deliberately designed to remain suspended and unresolved. Mallarmé symbolized the significance of this state of suspension through the shipwrecked Master, hesitating to throw the dice he holds, because through this action he may reveal some hidden truth. Critical discourse around the poem, and its many variations often focused instead of understanding 'Un Coup de Dés' as holding a key required for its understanding.

But instead, Mallarmé's poem can be reframed as a question locked within itself. As Albert Einstein said that 'God does not play dice', the purpose of all this was actually to emphasize to reflect on the role of chance. The poem's content is suggested, demanding from its reading a creative, active attitude, thus giving prominence to the reader's experience.

Man Ray

Fortune III
1946

Courtesy: Fabre Collection, Brussels

The word 'luck' is said to be derived from an old Anglo-Saxon verb meaning 'to catch' and therefore signifies something caught. Such a derivation seems reasonable when prosperity and adversity are thought by many to be dependent on fleeting opportunities that must be seized in passing.

Somehow the work 'Fortune III' by Man Ray seems to directly play on this idea of 'catching' something (be it in its way of making or in the associations it evokes). Originally created for his exhibition in Los Angeles in 1948, it takes part of his production of surrealist objects, assemblages in the spirit of readymades. These 'Objects of My Affection' as the artist called them, were notable examples of the crossover between popular culture and high art, a form of proto-pop art.

'It is an assemblage composed of a wheel of fortune and a roll of toilet paper affixed to an upright plank, similarly implied a wiping away of deceit and decay, and a scrubbing clean of social veneers. This piece evoked the surrealist 'penchant for chance, for objet trouvé, and for the double entendre.'
S. Ehrlich

Mohr, Manfred

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P2400-299_367_large_2
2018

Courtesy of the Artist & DAM Gallery, Berlin

'The balance between control and randomness is easy to explain. Controlled decisions, which reflect strong personal choices, are decisions which are imposed by a logic (for example permutation, or any other system one can invent). Random decisions however, become desirable when there are decisions to be made, of minor or of no particular importance to the flow of information ... An example: I want to draw a cube - the structure of the cube is imposed by its own logic, whereas the rotation in which I want to present the cube is of no special importance; therefore I let the computer choose the three rotation angles randomly. I once called these random decisions the 'whip' which keeps the program running... My interest rely on the rules of the game, the system which the artist use.'
Manfred Mohr

Manfred Mohr is a pioneer of algorithmic art who after discovering Max Bense's 'information aesthetics' started with computer generated geometry. Encouraged by the music composer Pierre Barbaud whom he met in 1967, Mohr programmed his first computer drawings which he presented in his first major museum exhibition 'Une esthétique programmée' at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1971.

The large scale print P2400-299 is a recent work of Mohr revisiting an algorithm from 1978. 'In 2017, out of curiosity, I had a new look at the first version of my code from 1978 and suddenly became interested in pursuing this handicap of 'no-rotation'. I used the original code with its rigid position of 45-degrees in all angles and directed the algorithm into a different visual solution. Again, the basic 32 lines which constitute the hypercube are divided into 4 sets, but this time the elements are called randomly and placed in a linear visual 4/4 rhythm.'

The work is a perfect example of Mohr general work using simple geometric operations but developing multiple dimensions, the hypercube, as in graph-theory and in time based logics such as the music score or rhythm.

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Monk, Jonathan

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The Surprise
2005

Courtesy of the Artist

'The Surprise' is an edition by the artist for Société proposing found 7-inch records with specially printed label and white cover. Each record consists of different pop singles mostly from the 1980s - with some of the records by well-known artists and others not. The re-labelling of the record by Monk means that the purchaser will not know what the original record is - hence the 'surprise'.

The edition of 50 copies each signed and numbered by Monk in pencil on the white outer cover. Each record is obviously unique within the edition. The artwork is a special Société-edition for sale.

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Frieder Nake

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Markov-Ketten (Markov chains)
2005 -

Courtesy of the Artist & DAM Gallery, Berlin

Frieder Nake belongs to the founding fathers of computer art. Influenced by Max Bense's Information Aesthetics, he produced his first works in 1963. His main work phases are identified by a collection of programs like: Walk-through-raster (1966), Matrix multiplication (1967/68), Generative aesthetics I (1968/69)...

The recent artwork by Nake 'Markov-Ketten' is based on the before mentioned program 'Walk-through-raster' which he re-activated on the occasion of an exhibition in Bremen. In probability there exist two basic types of probabilistic dependency. One: the probability is independent from the last result; for example, the probability to obtain a certain number by a throw of a dice is completely independent from the one before. Two: the probability is dependent of the result before; for example, like in a Markov chain. This stochastic condition is fulfilled if one can make predictions for the future past of the process based solely on its present state. Just as well as one could access the process's full history without actually knowing it.

As such the process even if involving randomness is not subjected to it but is controlled in its progression. Here 'chance' appears as something which is mastered. A process, due to which Nake obtains a huge variety of results, but where each of them follows a 'directed' progression. Hence, the coloured patterns in the work visualize this logic of what Nake calls 'controlled randomness'.

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Pichler, Michalis

Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard
2008

Courtesy: Private Collection

'Rather than surrounding a poem with white, empty margins, this 'silence' was dispersed through the work as part of its meaning. Instead of stringing words in linear sequence like beads, they were placed in unexpected positions on the page to express sensations and evoke ideas'
Philip B. Meggs

Michalis Pichler 'Le coup de Dés' meta-appropriate (that is, appropriate another artist's appropriation of) Mallarmé's poem. Pichler perforate the paper following Broodthaers' redactions, but combine all the pages into a single long sheet suitable for playing music on a street-organ. By sonofying the visual pattern Pichler give form to what Paul Valéry, Mallarmé's poet friend, stated when referring to the poems' white spaces as 'embodied silences'.

RAND Corporation

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A million random digits with 100.000 deviates
1955 (Second Edition: 2001)

Courtesy: Private Collection

A Million Random Digits with 100,000 Normal Deviates is a book by the RAND Corporation, originally published in 1955. The book, consisting primarily of a random number table, was an important 20th century work in the field of statistics. It was produced starting in 1947 by an electronic simulation of a roulette wheel attached to a computer. The RAND table was an important breakthrough in delivering random numbers, because such a large and carefully prepared table had never before been available.

The RAND book witnesses the increasing need for random numbers, unpredictable systems in the computer age. Random numbers have gained importance due to their usage within statistics and scientific simulations. In a society where we more and more depend on information, hence its security, we nowadays entirely rely on them in the field of cryptography, be it for our passwords, pin codes …

In the field of art, the interest in random number sequences was raised by artists exploring chance operations in their compositions and exploring computer-generated images. From the beginning of the 50-ies artists like Ellsworth Kelly, Herman de Vries, Gerhard von Graevenitz,… a.o., started to research new methods to introduce randomness in their work. Manfred Mohr, for example, created even his own random number book at the beginning of the 70-ies to complete his work.

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Sérandour, Yann et Fortier, Julie C.

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Pile ou Face
2007

Courtesy : Josée et Marc Gensollen Collection, Marseille

One day before the opening of the exhibition 'Quatorze jours avec', organised by VF Galerie in Marseille, the curators were asked to toss a one-euro coin in the air in the presence of invited witnesses. It had been decided that the produced artworks would only be shown if the result of the coin toss is 'Tails'. The result was 'Heads', thus nothing was exhibited except of the coin itself left on the floor in the empty space. The coin has been bought by two of the invited witnesses as a trace of the toss. Now the exhibited coin becomes an object of a 'non exposition', the consequence of a 1 on 2 chance decision.

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Spoerri, Daniel

Topographie anecoté du hazard (Anecdoted Topography of Chance)
1960

Courtesy: Private Collection

Following a conversation with his friend Robert Filliou, Daniel Spoerri one day mapped the objects lying at random on the table of his room. Like an archaeologist, he drew a topographical plan on parchment paper, on which he uses contour drawings to depict the exact position of the objects on the table. The topography freezes a situation of coincidences. The objects are indexed by randomly distributed numbers having no other purpose than giving access to their respective description and to spin an 'information network'.

Chance always played an important role in Spoerri's work; when asked one day whether chance still plays a role for him, he answered that it was gaining more and more importance because, not only due to recent scientific findings, it is the source of all evolution.

The items that have come together by chance on the table are described and supplemented by anecdotes not only from the original author but from his friend Dieter Roth as well. More than 80 items from daily life ranging from a white bread slice, once bitten (# 1), a drill case (number 34) to cigarette burn marks (number 80).
Many of the principal participants of FLUXUS make here their appearance. It's a game, a poem, an encyclopaedia, a cabinet of wonders: a celebration of friendship and creativity. The Topography personifies the whole FLUXUS spirit and constitutes one of the strangest and most compelling insights into the artist's life. From out of the banal detritus of the everyday life an autobiography emerges.

Although Spoerri mentioned these leftovers in his book 'Anecdoted Topography of Chance' there is a possibility that he always manipulated these images: That particular cigarette butt, for example, might never have been left on that particular plate after the meal. Maybe the artist himself put it there. We as viewers can never be certain about what Spoerri did or did not do, even if he really just fixated what his table guests left behind. Was it all pure chance?

Struycken, Peter

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LINARC 28-02-74
1974

Courtesy: andriesse ~ eyck galerie, Amsterdam

Within the 16 drawings, the sequence of the directions and dimensions of the lines and curves is arbitrarily determined. The 'coincidence' is carried out with the help of an algorithm for random calculations.

A limiting rule is the maximum length of the circles' rays and the straight line sections that may not be longer than the diagonal of a drawing. The line parts must also not come outside the drawing plane. Before drawing a line or arc, the program first calculates whether it falls within the boundary of the drawing or not. Should a line or arc fall outside the drawing, then again a line part is randomly generated, until it falls within the drawing. A minimum of 16 and a maximum of 32 line sections may be drawn.

In the odd-numbered drawings (top row) all line parts are connected and in the even-numbered parts (bottom raw) they are separate from each other. This difference in structure is very simple in itself, but it gives the drawings such a difference in character that the results fall into two 'classical' categories, those of 'figure' and 'composition'.

This shortened description of the process illustrates in how far computer generated drawings based on chance operation involves human decision.

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Young, La Monte

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An anthology of Chance Operations
1963 (Second Edition: 1970)

Courtesy: Private Collection

An Anthology of chance operations, concept art, anti art, indeterminacy, plans of action, diagrams, music, dance, constructions, improvisation, meaningless work, natural disasters, compositions, mathematics, essays, poetry.

Edited by La Monte Young in 1961, designed by George Maciunas, and published in 1963, An Anthology contains contributions by more than a dozen artists, many of whom would become associated with FLUXUS. The book is an early manifestation of the genre of artists' books in which the content is the artwork, but which also, like a manifesto, claim a new artistic approach: chance operations.

An Anthology contains a diverse array of contributions, including musical notation, visual and concrete poetry, graphics, instruction based works, and essays. One primary inclusion is Henry Flynt's 1961 essay 'Concept Art' in which Flynt frames Conceptualism as: *'an art of which the material is 'concepts,' as the material of for example music is sound. Since 'concepts' are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language.'*

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von Graevenitz, Gerhard

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Rot-blauer Raster I und II, 1974/ 1978
Kreissegmente auf schwarz, 1971
Zweiseitiges Spielobjekt: grün, blau mit jeweils rot/grünen Halbkugeln, 1966

Courtesy: Antje & Moritz von Graevenitz

'As Picasso stated: "I do not search, I find!", the method of serendipity in art is a question of finding, mostly by way of a 'lucky chance'. Something which could be a method, a strategy or a motive for a work of art could lead to a further intention for making art in general... Furthermore, the viewer takes on an important role: artists wanted, and still want to give the viewer a creative role as well, serendipity should be theirs by participation. The viewer should also 'find' something in art, something always unforeseen but discovered as an eye-opener'
Antje von Graevenitz

Gerhard von Graevenitz was a German artist which belonged to the international circle of the ZERO group as, during his stay in Paris, he was affiliated with the GRAV group and as he was a co-founding member of the nove tendencije.

In his work, von Graevenitz investigated and systematically visualized the phenomena of perception as determined by light, space and time besides principles of randomness or progression. He aimed to show a changing structure of geometrical elements with varying movement, its constellations unable to be predicted or determined. In 1958 he began his series of white monochrome reliefs 'White Structures' with concave and/or convex points or circles, showing structures as progressions, degressions and chance constellations on a grid. He also constructed 'play-objects', some of them meant as models for multiples. In 1962 he made serigraphs investigating non-hierarchical fields on the basis of chance-operations similar to his first kinetic objects. From 1972 onwards he used the possibilities of a chance-generator for computer-graphics, assisted by the mathematician Rolf Wölk.

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Werth, Elsa

1-2+3×4-5
2016

Courtesy: Private Collection

Elsa Werth's metal ruler consists of a simple artistic gesture. Between each number the artist has inserted a mathematical sign. The product of the numbers added, subtracted, multiplied or divided equals the ruler's actual size: 30 cm on one side and 12 inches on the other. Reaching the end of the sequence evokes the same 'lucky' surprise as solving a difficult mathematical formula.

Signatures
2018

Courtesy of the Artist

The work consists of a series of 100 unique copies, created by dropping a piece of string that takes a different random shape each time. Coincidence then becomes the signature of the work itself. In addition, it refers to Marcel Duchamp's work '3 Standard Stoppages' created in 1913, which is often considered to be the first work of art to have used the principle of probability. If a horizontal rope of one-meter long falls from a height of one-meter and therefore rolls up, this creates a new reading of the length measurement. Elsa Werth's strings were fixed on the canvas to capture the random shape obtained and to undermine the rational base of the meter.

25.04.19 - 29.06.19
Thu - Sun
3 - 7 pm

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