

“The randomness to me is always very precise, a kind of zeroing in.”

— Robert Smithson

“Then I made a superb dive into the human conscience, that I have infested with strange chances, formless flowers, and cries of marvels.”

— André Breton

CHANCE AND RANDOMNESS

DETAILS

Instructor	Jeff Thompson (Stevens Institute of Technology)
Email	jeff.thompson@stevens.edu
Office/hours	None since I will only be in Hartford on Fridays, but reachable by email :)
Meeting times	Fridays 9:30am–12:20pm, 1:30–4:30pm
Location	Varies, depending on what we’re working on that week
Website	https://github.com/jeffthompson/chanceandrandomness

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this seven-week course, we will explore chance and randomness as tools for making art. We’ll look at lots of historical examples—from visual art, music, popular culture, science, and technology—and create artworks that investigate the creative potential of letting go of artistic decisions and collaborating with chance and randomness. We’ll start with analog methods like drawing and collage, then move into writing code later in the class. The course culminates in a multi-week, open-ended project that connects the ideas covered in the class with your own creative practice.

Along the way, we’ll also discuss the differences between chance, randomness, information, and entropy, do some readings to contextualize our work, explore performance and scores for work, and discuss what happens when (to varying degrees) remove the artist’s hand in favor of mechanisms out of our control.

GRADING

The goal with all of these projects is experimentation. In our in-class work, we’ll probe the many ways that chance and randomness can be used to create art and design projects. At the end of the class, you’ll turn in a portfolio of these experiments along with one larger-scale project in the medium of your choice. Unlike a traditional class where improvement or mastery is the goal, this class is really about effort and making.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

This class is short, intense, and hands-on—for that reason, it's crucial that you're here, on time, and ready to work each week. You'll be allowed one absence during the course to use at your discretion. Each additional absence will lower your grade by one letter. Attendance will be taken in the morning and afternoon; three tardies equals one absence.

LEARNING ACCOMMODATIONS

The goal of this class is for everyone to succeed. If you have any questions about learning accommodations, please don't hesitate to talk with me during or outside of class.

PRONOUNS

As this course includes lots of interaction between students, it's important for us to create an environment of inclusion and mutual respect. This includes the ability for all students to have their chosen gender pronouns and chosen name affirmed. If the class roster does not align with your name and/or pronouns, please inform me of the necessary changes.

INCLUSION STATEMENT

Diversity and inclusiveness are essential to excellence in academic discourse and creativity. In this class, the perspective of people of all races, ethnicities, gender expressions and gender identities, religions, sexual orientations, disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and nationalities will be respected

and viewed as a resource and benefit throughout the semester. Suggestions to further diversify class materials and assignments are encouraged. If any course meetings conflict with your religious events, please do not hesitate to reach out to me to make alternative arrangements.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Fortunately for us, the Hartford Art School has provided funding most of the materials we'll use for in-class exercises. You will be asked to bring basic tools to class each week. For your homework, you'll need to provide your own materials and supplies so please budget accordingly. There is no textbook; readings will be provided as PDFs.

COURSE CALENDAR

Please note this may change depending on timing, interest, and other random variables. Check the class website regularly.

WEEK 1 (OCT 25): CHANCE OPERATIONS

Introductions, syllabus, cut-up photographs, gravity drawings, dérive, Surrealist newspaper poems

WEEK 2 (NOV 1): CHANCE OPERATIONS 2

Critique of homework, discuss reading, Oblique Strategies, making our own prompts, performance scores

WEEK 3 (NOV 8): RANDOM CHOICES

Critique of homework, Chaos Game, dice drawings, analog random generators

WEEK 4 (NOV 15): RANDOMNESS 2

Critique of homework, final project ideation session, work day

WEEK 5 (NOV 22): PSEUDO-RANDOMNESS, CODE

Critique of homework, introduction to Processing, drawing basics, loops, random values

[Thanksgiving break, no class]

WEEK 6 (DEC 6): ENTROPY, CODE 2

Feedback session on work in progress, discuss reading, random choices

WEEK 7 (DEC 13): FINAL CRITIQUE

Work time, critique of finished projects