# Chance as superior freedom

*Gustav Weiß*

If a roof tile falls on someone's head, it is truly a chance occurrence. In a ceramist's life, there may be chance occurrences that are related to his work. He does something the same way he has always done it and suddenly it does not turn out quite the same, or something happens that he cannot reproduce whatever he does. Then he says to himself, you know how it works and it doesn't work, or it works and you don't know why. This is a chance occurrence as Einstein once described it, a term for temporary human ignorance. To guard against negative chance occurrences – bad luck – potters of old affixed a mask to the kiln to ward off misfortune, and the Japanese pour a glass of sake on the kiln to placate the gods.

Today we know much more than thousands of years ago. But we still do not know the final cause. We do not even know why we exist at all. Some of what myths describe has now been explained by science. Of the creation of our planet, science says that it turned out like it did because it happened to be at a certain distance from the sun, that it has a temperature conducive to life and because the primeval atmosphere and certain organic compounds happened to occur. They were not chance occurrences because there were unknown causes for their creation but because they stemmed from chains of events that, taken individually, could lead to all kinds of things except organic substances or a primeval atmosphere of precisely this composition. No law that is known to us prescribed that they coincide – it was pure coincidence because independent chains of causality collided. Absolute chance, which is absolute because it has no cause, has the aura of creation through which "nature" produces the wealth of all things living.

Enlightened human beings experience pleasure when they discover things that were unknown to humans in distant times. They then say to themselves that many things that are reported must be taken to be symbolic. And in some way they come to the realisation that reality is not only nature but also a mystery. It used to be assumed that in physics everything could be described in terms of causality, but today it is apparent that especially events in microphysics do not necessarily follow from given conditions.

Belief in the creation, which has absorbed so many elements even from the time before myths, has always given humanity food for thought. In the first book of Genesis, chapter 2 verse 7, God "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life". According to research into prehistory, had been handed down to the authors of the Pentateuch, or Moses himself, from ancient times, for in the original, animistic religion, which recognised neither spirits nor demons nor gods, a magical method of this kind was effective. To beget a child gifted with the breath of life, the man's breath in the mouth of the woman was just as necessary as the "seed" for the whole figure of the child. Today, the kiss on the mouth or the nose has survived from this. And if people spit on a coin they have received nowadays, it is because of the traditional beneficial power of saliva. What is astonishing in this is that such animism with the same details of magical belief was spread all over the world, in all regions that were not in contact with each other, in the Near East, Africa, Australia and America. In those times, people were not overwhelmed by the inexplicable but had an explanation for everything. It was supplied via animals. Magical powers were ascribed to them: the scarab was endowed with magic for the fields, aquatic birds for rain and wind, the butterfly with the warmth of the sun. Amidst this magic of the animals, there was a supreme animal. It was too fast to be killed. It found animals that had been killed to discover whether the hunter that had killed it had first asked for forgiveness for killing it. If he had not, he fell ill and was pursued by misfortune. These were the ethics that were observed by a higher force.

When the mysterious became sacred, the time of myths began. It ended when humans began to ponder on transcendence. Karl Jaspers called this the axial age.

In his Metamorphoses, Ovid (43 B.C. – 17 A.D.) described the beginning of humankind's golden age. It was not until eighteen hundred years later that Darwin shook this belief with his theory of evolution. In the most recent confirmation of his theories, bone fragments have been found in Ethiopia belonging to an upright early human dating back to 4.4 million years B.C.

Darwin's theory draws a picture of the development of humans in many small steps, where chance repeatedly plays a specific part. Paul Ebrich and Bernd-Olaf Küppers have studied the role of chance in this context. In contrast, Richard Dawkins insists that natural selection lies beyond the reach of chance. And Robert Spaemann believes that one should not believe in the theory of evolution because of its reliance on chance. Erich Jantsch says, "God is evolution". It would be more appropriate to say evolution was one of God's methods.

In the eyes of God, humans are good and also sinners at the same time. The more people there are, the greater are the problems. Ten billion people by 2050; what will it be like in a thousand years or a million years! The population explosion can contribute to humanity wiping itself out, with or without the atom bomb. Like rats, they become more and more aggressive the more they are crowded together. Dinosaurs took 155m years until they died out. Humans could manage much sooner it seems, just because they believe different things. Sunnites fight Shiites, Catholics conducted the Thirty Years War against Protestants. This is no coincidence; it has its effective causes. Various branches of science describe these kinds of causes. Causality is one of its principles. But what happens intellectually is also not without causality. It was not without social causes that the ancient gods Zeus, Apollo, Amon Ra, Mithras, Baal, Thor or Wodan were cruel or merciful in various simultaneous versions, but they were always omnipotent. Even today, monotheism has a social significance in religion with Jahwe, god and Allah. And in ultimate, profound questions, with increasing knowledge we encounter a state in which causality is no longer imaginable. I acausality, belief and knowledge meet. Creation and destruction have no cause.

**Art and Randomness**

This time it is not an excuse for ignorance, nor for the opposite, the reason for knowledge, but the cause of a purpose. That is the case if you are determined to achieve a random result. In the case of a planned coincidence, the ceramist lets nature take its course in the firing because he cannot fully assess the situation. Chance looks a little different when an engobe develops cracks and the cracks fire the imagination. From among the many ways in which

Max Ernst played with chance results, Jackson Pollock took over the dripping technique that made him famous. Whereas he moved a perforated paint tin with his hand, Max Ernst Max Ernst did it more randomly by making the suspended paint tin swing freely. Incidentally, Jackson Pollock not only poured paint onto canvasses but he also dripped coloured glazes onto slabs; he called them "coulages". Or Yves Klein: he fixed a wet canvas to the roof of his car and drove from Paris to Nice. The squashed insects formed the random image, which he called "le vent du voyage". "Fumages" was the name Wolfgang Paalen gave to his pictures where he made smoke and scorch marks on a canvas with a candle. If all of these things are set up in this fashion, it is a random process used for creative ends. It is not unintentional, as would be the case with a purely random process.

An unintentional coincidence of forms and colours in everyday life that is photographed is also random. But it is liberated from profundity and from the formal dignity of being art.

Christian Janecke studied randomness in art for his doctoral thesis. It is his contention that Jean Arp, Max Ernst and Jackson Pollock made randomness acceptable in modern art, Jean Arp for his automatic poetry, max Ernst as one of the founders of Surrealism and Jackson Pollock for his drip technique. Chance in art is not meant here to mean that chance is a productive partner of the artist, relieving him of the need for invention. Luck and inspiration play a part here. Hans Jürgen Müller counters the assumption that art has to do with skill ("Kunst kommt vom Können") with the argument that art is invention. The question is whether art can ever be random or whether random events can participate in the creation of a work of art. If there is an attempt to create random art intentionally, it is clear that there can be no genuine randomness because any intervention by the artist involves intent. Thus imagination may be suspected of randomness but it can achieve no more than the combination of familiar forms or abstract figures in imaginative fashion, as is the case in fantastic realism, or in Kandinsky's work.

A special kind of random art happens today in a not exactly unintentional fashion,, more with unsuccessful intent, when someone who is not very experienced with the internet wishes to model a virtual piece of ceramics with one of the free programs that are available for this purpose. You try this and that, and perhaps an arbitrary mouse click occurs that leads to something you find pleasing. These amateurish experiments on the internet would not be worth mentioning if they did not tell us that nowadays there is a natural, real form of chance and an artificial, virtual variety.

In art, natural chance begins with children's drawings that stem from the child's needs for function and movement. And this gives rise to the idea that art is a means of drive satisfaction. It is a predisposition that like others is passed on in its individuality in humans by 20,000 – 40,000 pairs of genes in 46 chromosomes. In further generations, there is a decreasing proportion of the original genotype left because other genotypes are added through further pairings that have taken place. And all this is a random process. And with regard to the need for movement, it expresses itself in modern art in automatism, which extinguishes all categories of consciousness and moves outside any aesthetic intent. To put it more precisely: it is a form of automatism in the widest sense. It began with mechanical random texts (l'écriture automatique), which were created in an almost aleatory fashion, without a semantic sense ordered by the will. Max Ernst's "frottages" should be seen in this way. In similar automatic fashion in Abstract Expressionism, ceramics becomes the field of action for the free development of colour and form.

And now there is the artificial, virtual kind of chance that we can access intentionally. It offers itself on the computer when the modelling programme has a random generator. In the search for new forms of expression, ideas may be found that can be transferred to real ceramics.

According to all of this, just like in microphysics, astronomy or anthropology, chance can be the final reason in art. If we term evolution God's method, we could call chance God's will, a superior form of freedom.

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