

an incomplete pataphysic sortie

Edison's Introduction To Pataphysics home study guide

Excerpt 1.0

Baudrillard Duchamp Alfred Jarry Foucault James Joyce
John Cage Ionesco Picasso Breton Borges McCartney
Apollinaire Miro Artaud

or even so was not there, although Beatle songwriter Paul McCartney was very intrigued by pataphysics. Most people have heard him sing the word "pataphysics" at the start of his allegorical skull-busting song: *Maxwell's Silver Hammer*, on the gigantic *Abbey Road* album:

"Joan was quizzical - studied **pata-physical** science, in the home..."
 ("...bang bang Maxwell's silver hammer came down on her head...")

Pataphysics is about creatively escaping conventional restrictive habits of linear thinking and conceptualizing. The French term *décervelage* or "de-braining" is an ugly but arguably-fitting metaphor of such escape, and that word is often featured in early pataphysical literature.

Paul McCartney modeled his song *Maxwell's Silver Hammer* after an anthem written by French pataphysic theorist Alfred Jarry, simply titled: *Chanson Décervelage (Debraining Song)*. The protagonist of the Beatles' song (*Maxwell Edison, majoring in medicine*) with his silver brain-hammer, is just a pataphysics intern; allegorically administering debraining therapy to his plaque-brained, unenlightened friend Joan. With his little brain hammer, Edison turns on the light, clearing away unhealthy linear thinking habits for his friend. (And then McCartney's song tells us, Maxwell Edison performs *décervelage* for the policeman and the judge as well.)

French philosopher and writer, Alfred Jarry, is well known for being a main intellectual mentor of Surrealism and Dada. He was born in 1873 in the town of Laval, a century after Immanuel Kant established his seminal Surrealist philosophy, by publishing the groundbreaking *Critique of Pure Reason*. Jarry is remembered for his influential critique of how our use of language is too often strictly linear and often deficiently rational or reasonable - at the expense of ignoring the particular, in favor of the general and categorical.

Jarry was well-versed in various literatures, and was infamously wild and louche. He was a definitive poète maudit; and he habitually brandished a pistol about, which his friend Pablo Picasso purchased after his death. Jarry's gapped and non-linear paradigms of conceptualization and language, which he termed *pataphysics*, still even now after a century, continue to intrigue intellectuals, and to gather interest and study.

As well as for Surrealism, Dada, and Situationism in general, Jarry's pataphysics have been an important direct influence for many influential writers and artists, including Duchamp, Picasso, Joyce (*Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* are so distinctly pataphysical), Miro, Tinguely, Apollinaire, Borges, Calvino, Artaud, Ionesco, Julian Barnes; and not to mention the renowned tres moderne composer John Cage who famously noted that pataphysics "influenced everybody". (1)

John Cage also said that in his opinion James Joyce, with his unconventional writing, makes better use of Jarry's pataphysics than any of the other creative luminaries within Jarry's wide contemporary circumference of influence. (Obviously though, by conflating a pair of "dissimilar texts", one might question whether Joyce's non-linear warpings of traditional literary structures in *Finnegan*, for example, are so much more profound than what Picasso similarly does to the structures of rational visual representation in his *Demoiselles d'Avignon*.)

As with the singular *Tristram Shandy*, a century prior, Jarry's writing (2) is an exhibition of how language used in non-linear and anti-rational ways can often actually be the most efficient. It

can also often better address important non-linear, fuzzy, and incomplete concepts which might be impossible to even outline, with our standard delimited labeling, categorizing, and linear grammars, e.g. consider again *Finnegan's Wake* in this regard. Or consider Duchamp's *RRose Selavy* with her *Eau De Voilette*; (3) or Duchamp's amazing mathematical "infra-mince" based on Isaac Newton's imaginary but infinitely-pragmatic (no pun intended) fundamental principle of Calculus (universally referred to in math classes as the vanishingly small "delta-h").

Now, over a century after Jarry's time, there are currently many pataphysical organizations and institutes around the world, as well as pataphysical literature, specializing journals, and doctoral theses, etc. (Google it...) Dada icon Marcel Duchamp, like Jean Baudrillard (the studied contemporary writer, glittering postmodern cultural critic and simulacrum theorist) was long a member of the Collège de Pataphysique in Paris, and they both wrote directly about pataphysics, as did Umberto Eco, Breton, and Foucault, among many others. (4)

Jarry's writing is a demonstration of how incompleteness, non-truth, absurd ironies, broken allegories, hyperbolic metaphors, and parsed parody can sometimes offer the best approach to unusually complex or amorphous concepts and difficult truths.

Pataphysics is naturally likened by some to quantum physics. Jarry's pataphysics were promulgated by the posthumous publication of his *Dr. Faustroll*, six years after Einstein introduced quantum physics in 1905, with his paper on the photoelectric effect - proving that photons are impossibly both waves and particles at the same time.

In their natural unobserved state, photons always remain as both waves and particles, as well as neither waves nor particles - at the same time. Physicists call that semi-defined state *superposition*. And just as a single q-bit in a quantum computer can impossibly hold and not-hold a number of various different values all at the same time, so can a pataphysical word, sentence, image, or meme.

To borrow from the operation and curtilage of quantum physics: pataphysical texts will remain in "superposition" until they're conceptually observed, in the particular (no pun intended), and thereby mentally "collapsed" around an assisted fungible meaning - exactly in the same way as that occurs when a quon (quantum particle) collapses into distinct particular boundaries once it's observed ("measured" is the technical term) by consciousness.

Given the isomorphic relationship and mirrored reflections between the basic structures of pataphysics and quantum physics, it's easy to imagine an outline of coherence between these two very different enterprises. We can at least call that an interesting haptic synchronicity, or perhaps it's the zeitgeist, or better yet: a covalent topological conceptualization of the tenor of the times; i.e. simply a result of both Alfred Jarry and Albert Einstein breathing in the same fresh new Twentieth Century, non-Euclidian airs.

Additionally, and of equal significance: the unexpected discovery by physicists of surprisingly non-linear "quantum logic" does the same thing to the rational cause-and-effect logic of classical physics as pataphysics does in re-paradigm-ing the classical rational structure of human language and perforce most of all other surliminal interpersonal communication and thought.

Schrodinger's Cat is a famous and definitive pataphysical riddle. *Superposition* is a granted fact of quantum physics - proven over a century, both by irrefutable math and by extensive experimentation. But superposition is so strange and non-intuitive that nobody can think of an explicit description or even a decently-descriptive metaphor. Normal indicative language fails. We have neither the words nor the grammar for this. Physicists and pataphysicists have tried, but the two best metaphors they've come up with are a clock running both forward and backwards at the same time, or else pioneering quantum physicist Erwin Schrodinger's cat, which was explained as absolutely being at one point both alive and dead at the same time.

A colleague of Schrodinger explained that this is not about a sick cat; this is about a normal healthy cat in a situation of quantum superposition; being both actually live and actually dead at the same time. The fundamentals of quantum physics require that this strange situation is in fact a normal part of the real world. This fact of nature cannot be well-addressed by any known sensible metaphors, let alone rationally indicative words. Though an extreme example, this obliquely illustrates the bailiwick of pataphysics.

Pataphysics' clear parallels in the evolution of both haut-theoretical and pedestrian philosophies are highlighted, not just by Kant's un-reasonable groundwork, but also by Kurt Gödel's decisive 1931 two-pronged attacks on the radix of Positivism, proving mathematically that no information system whatsoever can possibly be complete in itself; and thus that all possible indicative explanations are deficient to some degree. Aside from its fundamental importance to pure math, high-level computing, and cryptography, one consequence of Gödel's proving his *Incompleteness Theorem* is that words, and all combinations of words, therefore have immeasurable fuzzy meanings, and always must.

Similarly, only one year after Gödel published this proof that information must always be fuzzy and Incomplete, Werner Heisenberg received the 1932 Nobel Prize for proving that all energy and mass itself must always be fuzzy and Uncertain. Heisenberg's *Uncertainty Principle* proves that even the physical world is at its base random, answerless and uncertain. Heisenberg proved that fundamental particles, which alone constitute the tangible world, do not even have exact locations as they move through space/time. Our fundamental particles, though they're stochastically predictable, are random actors on the lowest level. ("Randos", as they say.) And they shockingly do not play by the linear rules of cause and effect – at that level everything is simply and decisively stochastic. Irrespective of our mediated perceptions, physical reality at its root is "Incomplete" and "Uncertain" and precisely indescribable.

Pataphysics is about the pragmatics of "meaning" - which even per se is impossible to address properly. Buddha said: "Meaning is different from words. It will not be made manifest by means of words." He also said: "Meaning is entered into by words as in the same way that objects [are revealed] by a lamp". Plainly, those are both pataphysical statements. They incidentally have both been learned and passed down as wisdom through around a hundred generations; though they both do solidly resist a linear unpacking.

Alfred Jarry said that Pataphysics is about understanding the "science of imaginary solutions". This in itself, of course, is a non-linear pataphysical statement. It's absolutely indicative, but it doesn't automatically index to any unique meaning. It's a linguistically perfect statement, and

not meaningless - but some imagination must be employed to solve for the meaning Jarry intends to convey.

Around the year 1450, Johannes Regiomontanus, a German mathematician, imagined that the solution to some previously insoluble equations would involve the square root of -1 (negative one). But obviously there is no number (given the normal meaning of that word) which will equal -1 when multiplied by itself - and for one to imagine that is completely unreasonable and conventionally irrational. (It's un-measurable, and therefore cannot be ratioed or rationalized).

This incredible imaginary number of Regiomontanus has now been solving difficult equations for over half a millennium. That's five percent of Earth's current Holocene Age which began ten thousand years ago, as Earth finally warmed up, and we came out of the caves and invented farming - while the mile-high, two-million-year-old Quaternary ice sheets retreated into our current high-mountain glaciers. In the world of mathematics, the universal symbol for this extraordinarily useful pata-number is Descartes' nomination: a lower case i, for "imaginary".

It's interesting that Steven Hawking could only find a mathematical solution for his famous model of the absolute beginning/non-beginning of time itself (at the Big Bang), by using equations with i, this imaginary number - which of course can never be counted or fractionated like an actual number. Imaginary solutions indeed. Jarry would certainly be pleased.

Pataphysics purposes a focus on the inextricably particular, rather than the categorical. Jarry significantly said that Pataphysics involves grasping "the law that governs exceptions."

Jarry's definitive words and grammar here are inerroneous, as in the case for example of Zen's "sound of one-hand clapping." But logistically the concept is seemingly a circular conundrum, an oxymoron - since exceptions are obviously by definition contrapositive in any situation where some governing law is applicable. To the putative contrary though, in the 1970s, the Collège de 'Pataphysique in Paris published an explanatory corollary; isomorphic to Jarry's riddle:

"A law is fundamentally just the exception to an exception!" (5)

Despite their significant differences, like Zen, pataphysics is a conceptualizing practice not detrimentally restricted by enforced structural linearities and liabilities; and yet if one assiduously cobbles together the surfeit of unrestricted elementary conceptals made manifest in

Ref_1: Hugill, *Pataphysics, A Useless Guide*, 2015 MIT Press, Cambridge MA (a 266 page history of pataphysics its influences, and followers.)

Ref_2: *Ubu Roi* and *Faustrol*, etc.

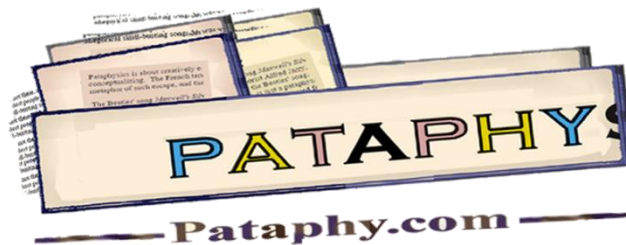
Ref_3: Note the reversal of the diphthong: Duchamp's perfume is referencing a little veil, not a violet.

Ref_4: Hugill, *Pataphysics, A Useless Guide*,

Ref_5: Op. Cit., pp.85

Ref_6: In accord with Heisenberg, Gödel, Postmodernism's "Incompleteness", and the tenor of *Collège de 'Pataphysique* in Paris: pataphysical documents may have no formal beginnings or endings, second degree logic, meanings transmitted only in overtones - and per Jarry's Dictum, reader/user input is often required to imagine more precise definitions for inherently inexplicit vocabulary and syntax.

- Veritas in Lorem Ipsum -



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**Evaluating the Inherent Breadth of
Conceptual Relativity, Uncertainty
and Incompleteness**

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