

The exception to all the rules

Buenos Aires hosts its first pataphysical congress. An expert explains.

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With the ongoing fever provoked by the release of the Beatles box sets, you might be eager to learn some trivia about the lyrics. The Beatles' 1969 song *Mamool's Silver Hammer*, from *Abbey Road*, mentions loan, a "quizzical" student who "studied 'pataphysical science at home.' But what does 'pataphysical science' mean?"

Pataphysics is a term coined by French writer Alfred Jarry (1873-1907) and is a philosophy dedicated to studying what lies beyond the realm of metaphysics. It is often expressed in nonsensical language.

In 1948, a group of artists and writers interested in the philosophy of Pataphysics founded the *Collège de pataphysique* in Paris. Raymond Queneau, Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, Boris Vian and Jacques Prévert were all part of the Pataphysics movement. Other prominent members of the *Collège* were Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Groucho Marx and Michel Leiris.

In 1957, a decade later, a group of Argentine artists founded the Longevo Instituto de Altos Estudios Patafísicos de Buenos Aires (LIAEPBA). Now, 52 years later, Buenos Aires city has organized its own Universal Congress of Pataphysics. The Congress features special guests such as Thieri Foule and Carlos Grassa Toro, two of the most important living members of the *Collège de pataphysique*.

The head of the Longevo Instituto de Altos Estudios Patafísicos de Buenos Aires, Rafael Cippolini, talked to the *Herold* about the history of pataphysics and the ongoing congress being held at the Malba Museum. Cippolini is an essay writer and curator, and one of the founders of *Razona* art magazine. During the Pataphysics Congress, Cippolini will lecture on several issues and will present the book *Patafísica: epítomes, recetas, instrumentos y lecciones de aparato*, for which he wrote an introduction and comments. The book (released by Caja negra) comprises essays by Alfred Jarry, Paul Valéry, Raymond Roussel, Erik Satie, René Daumal and Julien Torma.



Pataphysicists of all kinds — Julio Cortázar, Marcel Duchamp, Alfred Jarry and Boris Vian.

"Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions and it rests on the truth of contradictions and exceptions," Cippolini says. "It is a little bit complex but it's like that, as though it were Zen philosophy."

Could you tell us a bit more about the history of Pataphysics?

The *Collège de pataphysique* was founded in 1948 by a group of artists and writers. Although the *Collège* is the centre of the pataphysical universe, its following has grown in different cities around the world.

In 1957, Buenos Aires was the first city to have a pataphysical institute. This is why we decided to call it "Longevo" Instituto de Altos Estudios Patafísicos de Buenos Aires (LIAEPBA). We pataphysicists have our own calendar, which starts on the day Alfred Jarry was born, September, 8, 1873. So we might say that we are currently in the year 137. In Julio

Cortázar's *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* there's a beautiful essay about the Buenos Aires Institute. In 1957, pataphysicists wanted to organize a Pataphysics Congress, but there were no sources of financing. Now, 52 years later, we are finally fulfilling their dream.

Two members of Oulipo visited Buenos Aires two years ago. What's the link between this group and Pataphysics?

Oulipo was founded on November 24, 1960, as a subcommittee of the *Collège de pataphysique*; they named it *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* (Potential literature workshop). It was founded by French writer Raymond Queneau, a "Transcending Satrap," one of the most important hierarchies of the *Collège de Pataphysique*. Oulipo grew bigger and bigger, so much so that, even if it remained part of the *Collège*, some of its members (Georges Perec among them) were not pataphysicists.

LIAEPBA has some degree of autonomy from the Paris College. I'm a member of both.

Where's the BA Institute located?

We have several quarters. Now, we are meeting at the Archibrazo (Mario Bravo 400). It used to be the old printshop of Juan Andralis. His son is now a member of the Institute.

The programme of the Congress is very interesting — workshops, lectures, films. Besides, two of the most important pataphysicists — Thieri Foule and Carlos Grassa Toro — will be interviewed — Foule is the representative of the vice-curator. The vice-curator is one of the reptilian founders of the *Collège*; Lutembi, a crocodile that lives on the shores of

Lake Victoria in East Africa. The whole *Collège* is under the leadership of an African crocodile. This crocodile, however, cannot speak and will only communicate through his agent, Thieri Foule, through telepathy. On the other hand, Grassa Toro is one of the most important pataphysicists in the Spanish-speaking world, together with Fernando Arrabal.

How do you work at LIAEPBA?

The rules of the Buenos Aires institute change every year. Pataphysics is a universal science but there are certain things about LIAEPBA which are typical of our culture. The Institute is divided into three chapters — I belong to the "Concejo de Admirables Nababos."

What issues will the workshops deal with?

We did a lot of exercises and the audiences were like guinea pigs. Last week, we focused on a certain cultist. LIAEPBA has some degree of autonomy from the Paris College. I'm a member of both.

We are currently studying the possible link between Aurelie Antoine and the monster of the Nahuel Huapi lake — the "Nahuelito." Some people say the Nahuel Huapi monster is the same one as the Loch Ness monster, and that it travels from one place to the other. So you could say that we study the link between Au-

relie Antoine and the Loch Ness monster. It was in 1910 that the first "Nahuelito" sighting was reported. Awkwardly, Aurelie Antoine was in the area at the moment and could have seen "Nahuelito." Pataphysics opens up unexplored possibilities, dealing as it does with the limits of logical possibilities. The results of our research have no use at all.

What's your lecture on the "Sex Appeal of Imaginary Solutions" about?

As I said before, our work is based on the collective imaginary. One of my colleagues is studying whether boiling pans were ever used for vandalism purposes. So his work is classifying the different types of pans and acts of vandalism. Now, pans were probably never used for vandalism, just as it is unlikely that Aurelie Antoine ever saw "Nahuelito." So the solutions to all these problems are imaginary. Sometimes, imaginary solutions make use of sex appeal and suddenly become seductive.

Which Argentine writers are pataphysicists?

Oliverio Girondo was a pataphysicist and a member of the *Collège*. Cortázar too was a big fan of Pataphysics, he wrote a lot about it. As a matter of fact, the main characters in his novel *Rainuela* (*Hoy scotch*), La Maga and Oliveira, discuss Pataphysics all the time. Francisco Garamona and Damián Tabarovsky are also members of LIAEPBA.

Why do pataphysicists say they have nothing to do with Surrealism?

Some pataphysicists are big fans of Surrealism. Not my case. But Surrealism is an avant-garde movement, and Surrealist works are clearly identifiable, but Pataphysics has nothing to do with avant-garde movements. Pataphysics is a way of living life and relating to objects. Besides, Surrealism aimed at changing the world — we do not. Surrealism was "ahead of the crowd," whereas Pataphysics has nothing new to offer, we're vintage stuff. Furthermore, surrealism made use of automatic writing and other procedures that we don't use. Of course, there are some issues in common. André Bretón said Alfred Jarry was the pioneer of surrealism. But that was his opinion. If I play a song by The Beatles, it doesn't mean I'm a member of The Beatles. Even when Paul McCartney was interested in Pataphysics. Many surrealist artists were interested in Pataphysics, but this doesn't mean that they were part of the movement. Pataphysics is a philosophy, one can be a pataphysicist all his life and not one would be able to tell.

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WHERE & WHEN

At Malba Museum, Av. Figueroa Alcorta 3415. Tel: 4808-6560. Until September 24. Free admission. Visit www.malba.org.ar

MY TOP 10



Favourite film: *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1956).
Currently reading: *Like a Project of Which No One Tells* by John Ashbery, translated by Roberto Echavarrén (Interzona, 2009).
Best breakup song ever: *Beautiful, Dirty, Rich* by Lady Gaga.
Where would you take a first date? Out to have some tea during the afternoon at the Jardín Japonés.
Celebrity dinner date: Regina Spektor.
Last night's dream: I dreamt about nice aliens about two days ago.
Last hangover: Two weeks ago.
Which superhero would you like to be? Batman in the Italian version of the 1930s. *L'Uomo Pipistrello*.
Secret talent: I have no idea.
Final words or epitaph: The same words Mel Blanc chose: That's all folks!