

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## AI Cracked Hundreds of Unsolved Math Problems. Mathematics May Never Recover Its Old Identity.

Our Friends · Thursday, October 22nd, 2026

When OpenAI published proofs for hundreds of previously unsolved mathematical problems, the announcement did not arrive as an incremental advance. It landed as a structural disruption, forcing the discipline to ask not what remains to be proved but what it means to understand a proof at all. The event, reported by [ThePrint](#), has drawn responses from mathematicians, literary theorists, and cultural critics alike, each recognizing that something foundational has shifted.

### Probability Leaves the Classroom

The editorial team at Loterijuguru follows the Lithuanian lottery and online-gaming scene not as participants but as close readers of how ordinary people encounter chance. What struck them in the OpenAI development was something already familiar from a very different context. [Loteriju Guru](#) functions as one such everyday arena, where Lithuanian players approach odds and randomness not as abstract numerical constructs but as texts to be actively read, weighed, and interpreted, enacting precisely the kind of meaning-making that the AI proof story now demands of professional mathematicians.

“The interpretive act OpenAI just pushed onto mathematicians is something local players have been doing informally all along — reading odds, forming judgments, making sense of outcomes that no single answer fully explains.”

When OpenAI generated proofs that human mathematicians had not produced independently, it did not remove the human from mathematics. It reassigned the human’s role from author to reader. That reassignment, the team observed, mirrors what happens whenever someone encounters a probability and must decide what it means for a decision in front of them.

### The Sokal Affair and the Old Battle Line

That tension between mathematical rigor and humanistic interpretation has a charged history. In the spring and summer of 1996, Alan Sokal, emeritus Physics professor at NYU, submitted a hoax article to the cultural studies journal *Social Text*. The article, titled “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity,” was, by Sokal’s own account, “liberally salted with nonsense.” His explicit aim was to expose what he called a “decline in the standards of intellectual rigor in certain precincts of the American academic humanities,” specifically the misuse of scientific and mathematical concepts in ways that working scientists and

mathematicians could not take seriously.

Social Text published it. The exposure that followed was swift and damaging. Sokal argued that postmodernist literary theory, taken to its logical extreme, implies that “if all is discourse and ‘text,’ then knowledge of the real world is superfluous; even physics becomes just another branch of Cultural Studies.” The article’s reach proved durable — it now carries over 2,000 citations on Google Scholar, a number that speaks to the controversy’s long institutional afterlife.

Jacques Derrida, whose work on deconstruction supplied much of the methodological scaffolding for cultural studies, declined to engage Sokal’s critique directly. His published response ran to two words: “Poor Sokal.” He elaborated only to say that he was “always sparing and prudent in the use of scientific references” — a remark that cast Sokal’s maneuver as intellectually beneath reply rather than as a legitimate indictment. Cultural studies, however, did not emerge unscathed. As Subhasish Ray, Professor and Associate Dean of Research at the Jindal School of Government and Public Policy at O.P. Jindal Global University, notes in his essay, the field came out of the affair as a lesser force, its credibility considerably diminished.

## **A Literary Theorist Enters the Mathematics Journal**

Three decades after Sokal, the pivot that cultural studies could not force has arrived unbidden from a different direction entirely. Jordana Cepelewicz, Maths editor at Quanta, a Pulitzer Prize-winning web magazine, published an essay titled “Is AI the End of Math As We Know It?” in direct response to the OpenAI breakthrough. Her argument is that the discipline must now reorient from generating proofs toward interpreting them, a shift she frames not through mathematics but through literary theory.

Cepelewicz invoked Roland Barthes’ 1967 essay “The Death of the Author,” in which Barthes argues that it is the reader, not the writer, who holds ultimate control and agency in creating a work’s meaning. Applied to mathematics, the frame is precise. When AI generates a proof that a human mathematician did not construct, the mathematician’s role is no longer that of creator. It becomes that of interpreter, someone who must make sense of a completed structure they did not build, must explain what it means, why it matters, and how it connects to the wider body of mathematical knowledge.

That is interpretive work. It is also the kind of work that Sokal spent considerable energy arguing had no legitimate place in the domain of rigorous science and mathematics.

## **Grief on a Podcast, and an Open Question**

The professional response has not been uniform enthusiasm. Steven Strogatz, Maths professor at Cornell University, experienced what Ray describes as a dramatic breakdown on a New York Times podcast. Strogatz said that solving theorems had given him a “sense of purpose in life,” and that watching generative AI claim that function was an occasion for grief. The response was personal and unguarded, the reaction of someone confronting the possibility that the activity that defined his intellectual identity may no longer require him.

Derrida’s retort to Sokal takes on an odd resonance in that context. The philosopher who dismissed Sokal’s theatrics as cheap tricks now looks, from a certain angle, like someone who anticipated the collision between proof-making and meaning-making, even if he never expected AI to be the catalyst.

Ray's essay closes with a question that proves harder to answer than the theorems OpenAI resolved. Whether young mathematicians trained in the discipline of theorem-proving will embrace the interpretive work of making sense of AI-generated proofs — work that carries none of the prestige of original discovery — remains genuinely open. The institutional incentives of mathematics have long rewarded those who prove. What they will do with those who only, or primarily, interpret is a question the discipline has not yet begun to settle.

*Photo: Vitaly Gariev via Pexels*

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