CONDI—
—TIONA
LISM—

An essay discussing the creative strategy
‘conditionalism’ by Max Rentmeester

14 November 2022

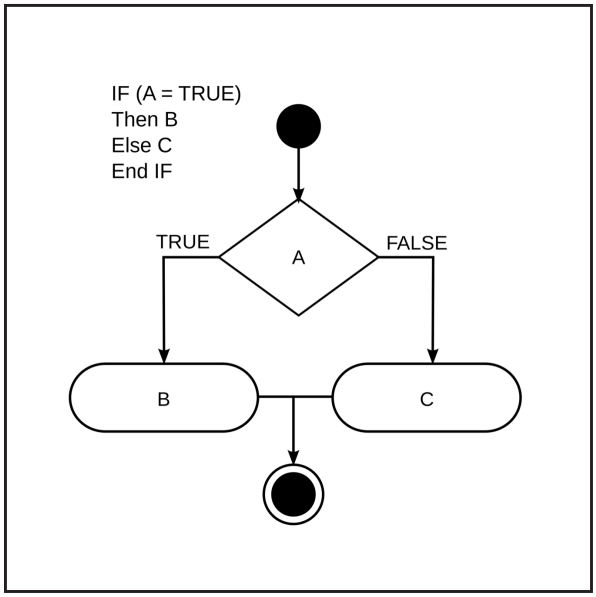
In this essay, I will explore the strategy of "conditionalism" across three different disciplines. Firstly, I will introduce the term conditionalism, the main principles, and the relationships and differences with other strategies. Afterwards, I will cover four art works where conditionalism is practiced across three different disciplines (performance art, musical composition and visual arts).

Conditionalism is a creative strategy that uses a set of conditions under which an artwork is created or generated. Using various rules and/or constraints showcases how a system can generate various different outputs. This strategy does not focus on only the final outcome but rather the various iterations and differences in the variables. Similarly to "Process Art," it emphasizes the process of creation and the transparency of certain systems behind the process. As conditionalism is an iterative strategy, for the best result, it is recommended that multiple outputs as well as the conditions be displayed for comparison.

Conditionalism is not limited to, but can be compared to generative programming. In every programming language, variables and conditions are used to create a rule set for the algorithm.

```
//Variables
int r = int(random(0, 255));
int g = int(random(0, 255));
int b = int(random(0, 255));
int newStrokeWeight = 10;

//Conditions
if (keyPressed && key == ENTER) {
      newStrokeWeight++;
}
```



Conditions and variables can be translated outside of a programming environment as well. In a musical composition, the instruments in a non-linear order can be variables and conditions. Traditional painters can also set up their own conditions according to predefined parameters and conditions in which they create or generate the artwork. In this essay, I intend to concentrate on works that employ the conditionalism strategy outside of the digital realm, as computer-generated artworks may have an overly direct relationship with conditionalism's principles.

It may seem that conditionalism has elements of aleatory principles, which means that some elements of the composition are left to chance. Chance does not represent conditionalism; in fact, it may be the exact opposite: chance represents disorder and randomness. In conditionalism, a desired output can be tweaked and changed based on the conditions and parameters. An observation of conditionalism is the ability to capture a specific datum or epoch within the process of creation and an algorithm, especially when a work is fixed.

I will elaborate further on conditionalism applied in art works.

Marina Abramovic, *"Rhythm 0"*

This performance art piece was created and performed in 1974 by Marina Abramović, a Serbian artist. Marina Abramovic has been fascinated by the ownership of the body through self-inflicted violence, pain, and life-threatening situations throughout her artistic career. Rhythms is a series of performances where she performs self-inflicted harm live in front of an audience. In Rhythm 0 (1974), she invited audience members to participate in these harmful actions by means of 72 different provided tools. The instructions for the performance were:

> *"Instructions.*
> *There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired.*
> *Performance.*
> *I am the object.*
> *During this period I take full responsibility.*
> *Duration: 6 hours (8 pm – 2 am)."*

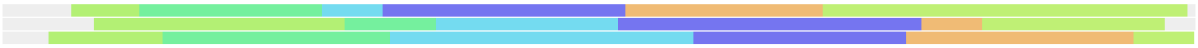
She provided a set of props such as a gun, bullet, lipstick, pocket knife, form, flowers, chains, needles, paint, newspaper, and bread. The items provided determine the process and outcome of the performance. The objects themselves will set the narrative of the performance; by changing the objects, the performance can have a completely different narrative. Aside from the objects, the audience was another important condition for this performance. Throughout the performance, the audience started moving her as well as cutting her, progressively behaving more violently. Within the audience, there naturally came about multiple groups: a group inflicting pain and violence on Marina Abramović as well as a group preventing and protecting her. The number of people in the audience would also change the behavior. If only one person at a time had been allowed, there would not have been the urge for social control and the feeling of judgement, which would dramatically change the outcome.

Terry Riley, *"In C"*

This composition, called In C, was originally composed by Terry Riley in 1964 for a variety of performers. Although he recommends: "a group of about 35 is desired if possible but smaller or larger groups will work".

The composition contains pieces of melodies in which the musicians of the ensemble have complete freedom in their decision on when to progress to the next piece, with no predetermined duration. Even though there is almost complete freedom for the musician, there are a few conditions. All the musicians are allowed to progress individually, but they still need to stay at least three bars near each other. When a performer reaches the last bar, they need to repeat it until the whole ensemble catches up, after which they slowly fade away.

When examining the sheet music, it can be seen that it is composed of 52 separate segments of music, disconnected from each other unlike traditional compositions. The freedom of the individual musician results in a unique and dynamic result every time it is performed. Interesting and unique outcomes occur when various different segments overlap with each other, as shown below.

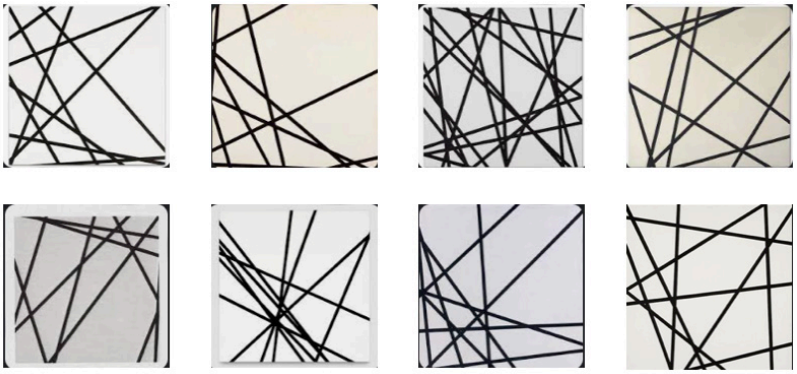


In this case, the individual choice of the performer on what section to play and when is not to be confused with improvisation. A big difference between conditionalism and improvisation is the use of predetermined parameters and conditions. Using improvisation, like chance, is more dependent on the performer's emotional choices and spontaneity in response to other performers with few constraints. Conditionalism may generate a new output with every iteration, but there should still be a clear correlation between all iterations.

François Morellet, *“10 lignes au hasard”*

The French artist François Morellet has been using chance and conditions in his work since 1958. Mathematics were also often used in his work, where he used certain parameters and conditions while having no control over the outcome of the final artwork. In 1971, François Morellet created the artwork “10 lignes au hasard”, a series of ten paintings consisting of a black line across a white canvas. He used the border of the painting as an axis and used the value of pi (π) to determine the angle of the line drawn on the canvas. He specifically used pi as a parameter because of the unpredictable nature of the value and the fact that it is infinite, allowing for endless variations. Instead of displaying just one painting, the series of works next to each other really highlights the system used behind the work.

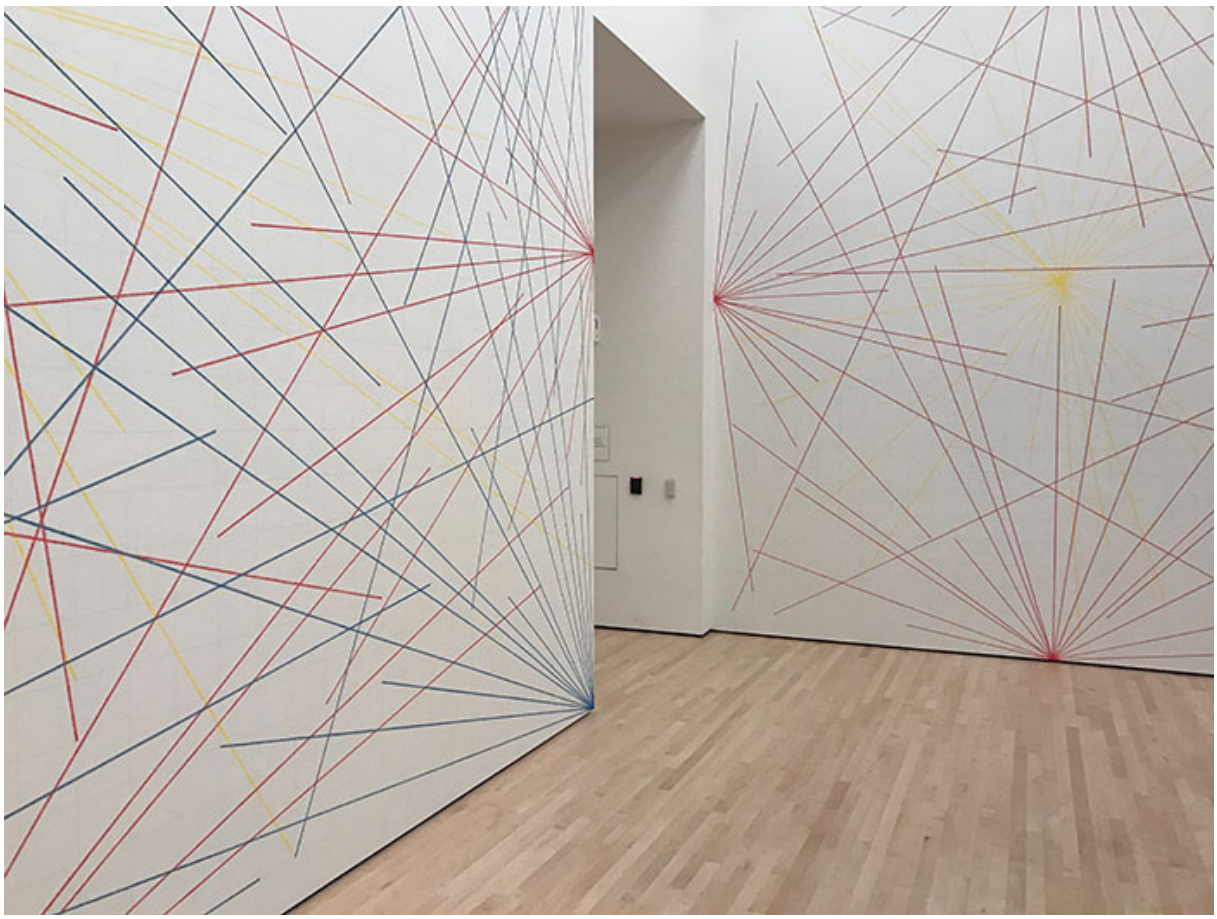
Morellet always titles his art works with the system he used for the particular work in order to make his works “verifiable” and have the ability to be reproduced. As the system itself is the most important factor, it results in work that is very geometric and minimalistic, reducing the amount of manual input to a minimum.



Sol LeWitt, *"Wall Drawings"*

Throughout 1968 and until his death, Sol LeWitt created more than 1,270 wall drawings. These large mural drawings are based on a set of guidelines, parameters, and conditions. The drawings are mostly two-dimensional, minimalistic, and geometric and are directly drawn on a wall. All the drawings come with a set of instructions where the conditions are laid out; generally, the drawings were not drawn by himself but mostly by his team and assistants. Even to this day, the instructions are being used to reproduce the wall drawings because of the concise instructions created by LeWitt, leaving little to no room for interpretation.

In this piece, it was LeWitt's intention to make the underlying system as transparent as possible by including the instructions on the wall itself. The viewer will be able to go back through the steps of the instructions and compare the geometry drawn on the wall. With these clear instruction anyone is able to reproduce the Wall Drawings. A big variable in the drawings is the medium itself, as the Wall Drawings let the surrounding and various surrounding objects on the walls take part in the drawing, which results in reproductions of the same instructions that can look vastly different depending on the variables of the wall itself.



The instructions of ‘Wall Drawing 273’:

> *“A 6” (15 cm) grid covering the walls. Lines from corners, sides, and center of the walls to random points on the grid.*
> *1st wall: Red lines from the midpoints of four sides;*
> *2nd wall: Blue lines from the four corners;*
> *3rd wall: Yellow lines from the center;*
> *4th wall: Red lines from the midpoints of four sides, blue lines from four corners;*
> *5th wall: Red lines from the midpoints of four sides, yellow lines from the center;*
> *6th wall: Blue lines from four corners, yellow lines from the center;*
> *7th wall: Red lines from the midpoints of four sides, blue lines from four corners, yellow lines from the center.*
> *Each wall has an equal number of lines. (The number of lines and their length are determined by the draftsman.)”*

With these clear instructions, anyone is able to reproduce the Wall Drawings. One big variable in the drawings is the medium itself, as the Wall Drawings let the surrounding and various surrounding objects on the walls take part in the drawing, which results in reproductions of the same instructions that can look vastly different depending on the variables of the wall itself.