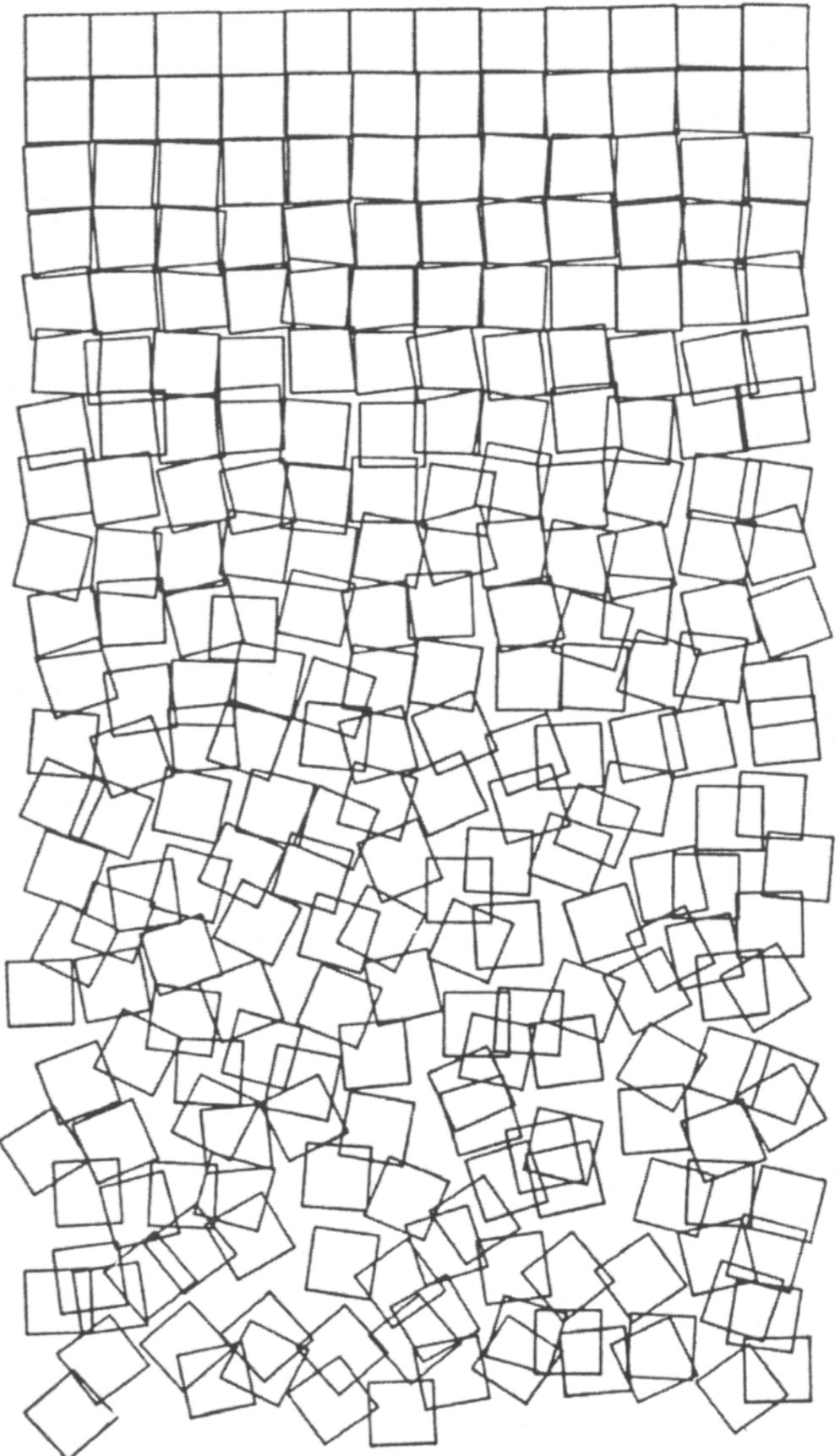


# RANDOMNESS & CREATIVE CODE

DANIEL C. HOWE  
UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS  
LONDON, JULY 9, 2021



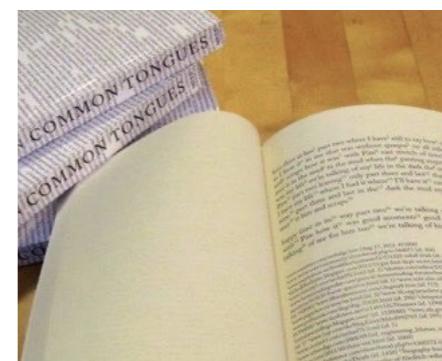
*Schotter (Gravel)* - Georg Nees, 1968



desperate course was to ask a fellow prov  
of mine to trace Ah-Q through his crimin  
ord. [REDACTED] got  
: no such individual – by the name of Ah  
Ah-Gui, or anything like it – existed. Th  
I had no way of finding out whether this  
deed the case, or whether my acquaintar



swimming back alone to the bathing rock, head under,  
he reaches out to grasp the familiar ledge, a fold in the  
rose-tinged granite just above the surface of the  
waist-deep water at its edge, by the stone which he can  
see clearly though unfocused through the lake water.  
but he has not reached it yet, his expectant hand breaks  
the surface, down through 'empty' water and his  
knuckles graze the rock, his face will not rise up,  
dripping and gasping, out of the water, instead, it 'falls'  
forward and, momentarily, down, into the shallows,  
stumbles, breathes a choking mouthful, which he



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SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY, RANDOMNESS IS ONE OF THE KEY PIECES THAT CONSTITUTE THE LANGUAGE OF ART.

---

LALI BARRIÈRE

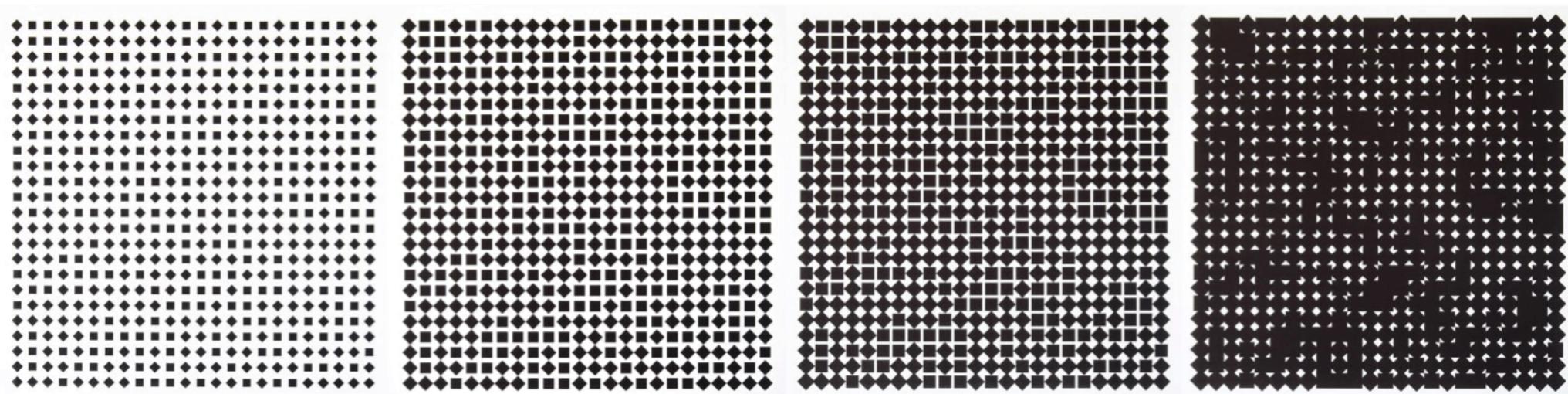
- INTRODUCTION: RESOURCES
  - THEORETICAL: WHAT IS RANDOMNESS?
  - AESTHETIC: EXAMPLES IN ART + DESIGN
  - STRATEGIC: WHY USE RANDOMNESS?
  - PRACTICAL: USING RANDOMNESS EFFECTIVELY
- 

# OBJECTIVES

# RESOURCES



<https://github.com/dhowe/rws>



VERA MOLNAR, CARRÉS EN  
2 POSITIONS 1-4 , 2011-13

A screenshot of a GitHub repository page for `dhowe/rws`. The page shows a commit history for the `master` branch, which includes updates to `README.md`, creation of `RandomRects.js`, `RandomWalk1.js`, and `RandomWalk2.js`, renaming `Recode-Quads.js`, creating `Recode-Schotter.js`, and updating `randomness.png` and `slides.pdf`. The most recent commit was 15 seconds ago. Below the commit history is the `README.md` file content:

```
A micro-workshop on randomness

Resources

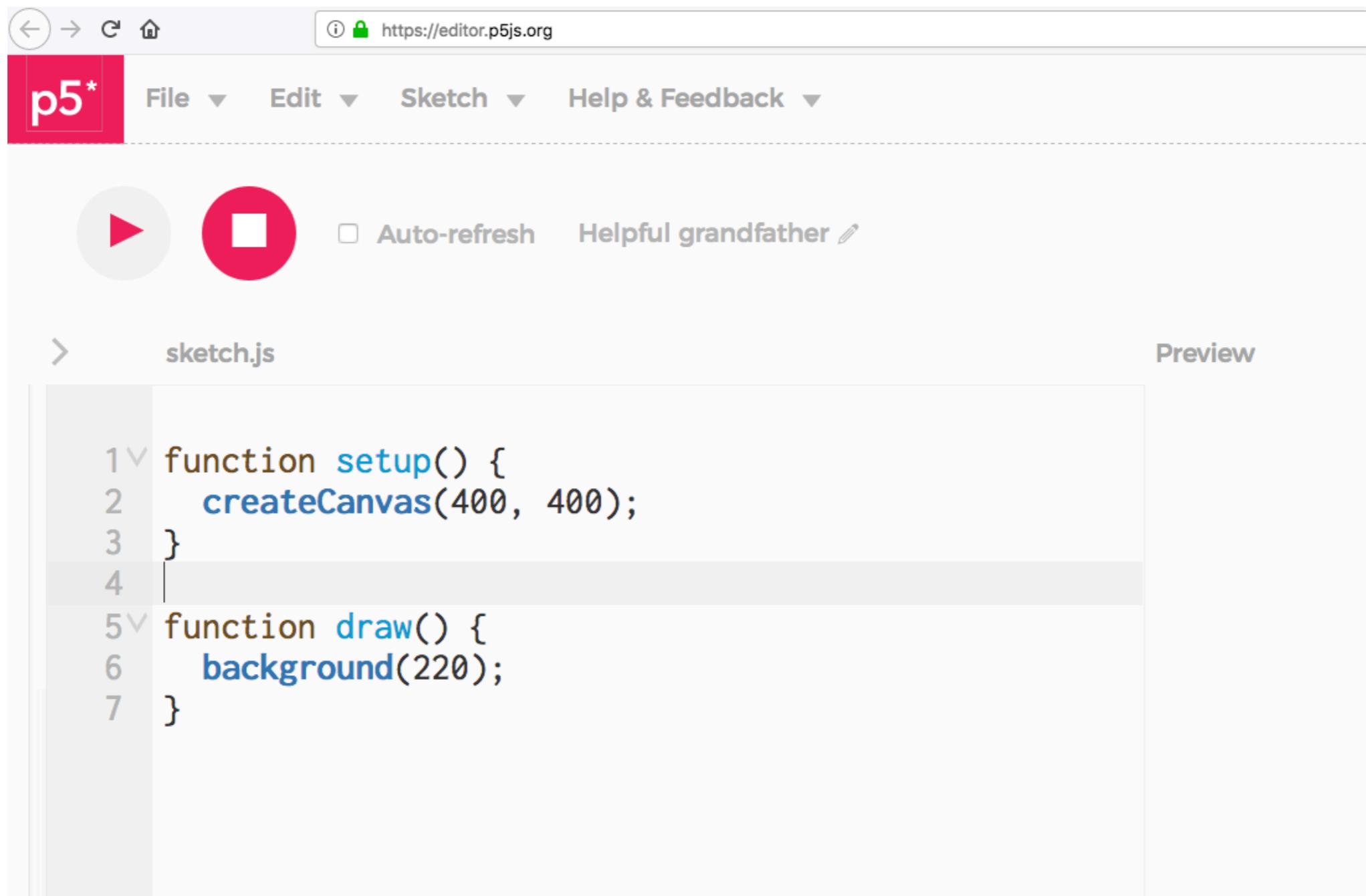

- Lecture slides (.pdf)
- p5.js editor and reference
- Vera Molnar on randomness (2-min video)

```

A red arrow points from the bottom of the `Resources` section down to the URL at the bottom of the image.

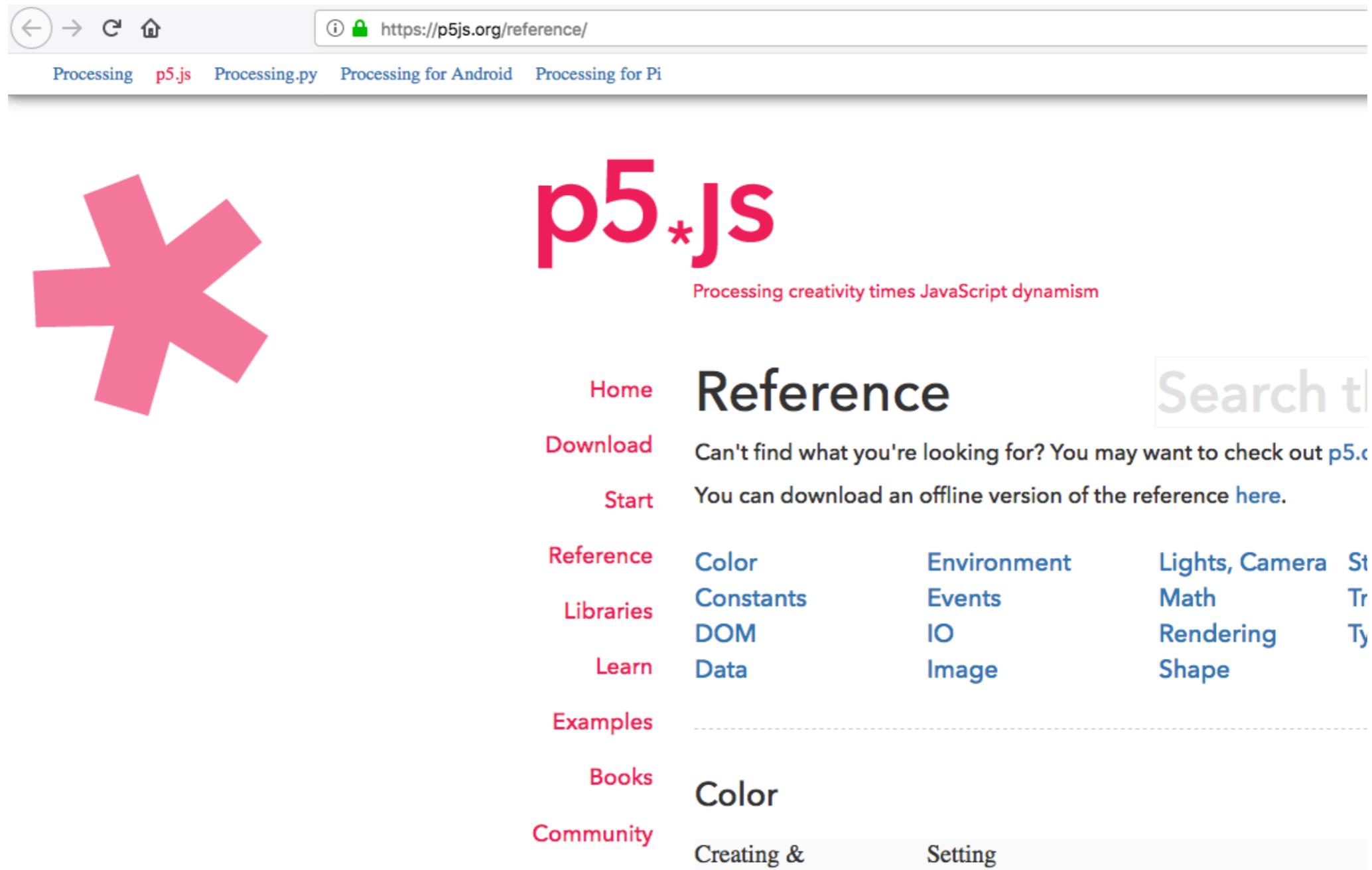
<https://raw.githubusercontent.com/dhowe/rws/master/slides.pdf>

# TOOLS: P5.JS EDITOR



<https://editor.p5js.org>

# TOOLS: REFERENCE



The screenshot shows the p5.js reference website at <https://p5js.org/reference/>. The page features a large pink asterisk icon on the left. The title "p5.js" is prominently displayed in pink, with the subtitle "Processing creativity times JavaScript dynamism" below it. A search bar is visible on the right. The main content area includes navigation links like Home, Download, Start, Reference, Libraries, Learn, Examples, Books, and Community. Under the "Reference" section, there are tables for Color, Environment, Math, DOM, Events, IO, Data, Image, Rendering, Shape, and Text. The "Color" table has rows for "Creating &" and "Setting".

Processing p5.js Processing.py Processing for Android Processing for Pi

# p5.js

Processing creativity times JavaScript dynamism

Home

Download

Start

Reference

Libraries

Learn

Examples

Books

Community

Color

Environment

Math

DOM

Events

IO

Data

Image

Rendering

Shape

Text

Creating &

Setting

Search t

<https://p5js.org/reference/>

# RANDOM()

## Description

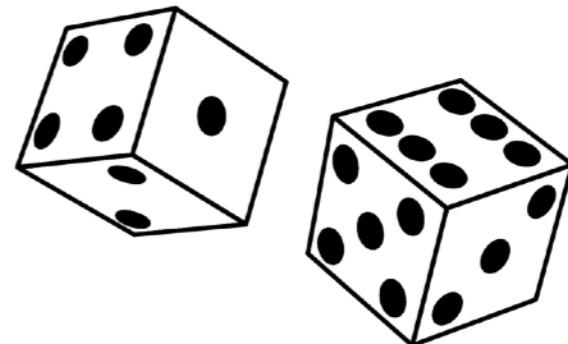
Return a random floating-point number.

Takes either 0, 1 or 2 arguments.

If no argument is given, returns a random number from 0 up to (but not including) 1.

If one argument is given and it is a number, returns a random number from 0 up to (but not including) the number.

If two arguments are given, returns a random number from the first argument up to (but not including) the second argument.



# QUICKSTART

> sketch.js\*

```
1  function setup() {
2    createCanvas(500, 400);
3    background(255);
4  }
5
6  function draw() {
7    let x = random(0, width);
8    let y = random(0, height);
9    let sz = random(5, 50);
10
11   let r = random(0, 255);
12   let g = random(0, 255);
13   let a = random(0, 255);
14
15   fill(r, 255-g, 255, a);
16   square(x, y, sz);
17 }
18
19
20
```

Preview

file: [RandomRects.js](#)

- INTRODUCTION: RESOURCES
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- 

# OBJECTIVES

RANDOMNESS HAS AN INCREDIBLY POWERFUL PLACE IN OUR CULTURE. IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, YOU CAN SEE IT DRIVING THE ALGORITHMS THAT RUN OUR INFORMATION ECONOMY, PATTERNS THAT MAKE UP THE TRAFFIC OF OUR CITIES, AND ON OVER TO THE WAY THE STARS AND GALAXIES FORMED.

---

DJ SPOOKY

**HOW TO DEFINE RANDOMNESS ?**

---

**RANDOMNESS**

**IS '2' A RANDOM NUMBER ?**

---

**RANDOMNESS**

A NUMBER IS RANDOM WHEN  
THERE IS AN EQUAL PROBABILITY  
FOR IT TO BE SELECTED FROM A  
SET OF POSSIBLE VALUES...

---

# RANDOMNESS



**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING TWO  
SEQUENCES OF 20 COIN FLIPS:**

- A. HTHHTTTHTTTHTHHTHTHH
- B. TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

**WHICH IS MORE LIKELY, A OR B?**

---



ACCORDING TO PROBABILITY, THE TWO ARE EQUIALLY LIKELY, EACH HAVING A CHANCE OF 1 IN 1048576

- A. HTHHTTTHTTTTHHHHTHTH
- B. TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

BUT WHICH SEQUENCE IS MORE RANDOM?

---

LESS  
RANDOM  
(SHORTER)



B. TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

*write T 20 times*

C. TTFFTFFTTFFTTFFTTFF

*write TTFF 5 times*

A. HTHTTHTHTTHHHTHTH

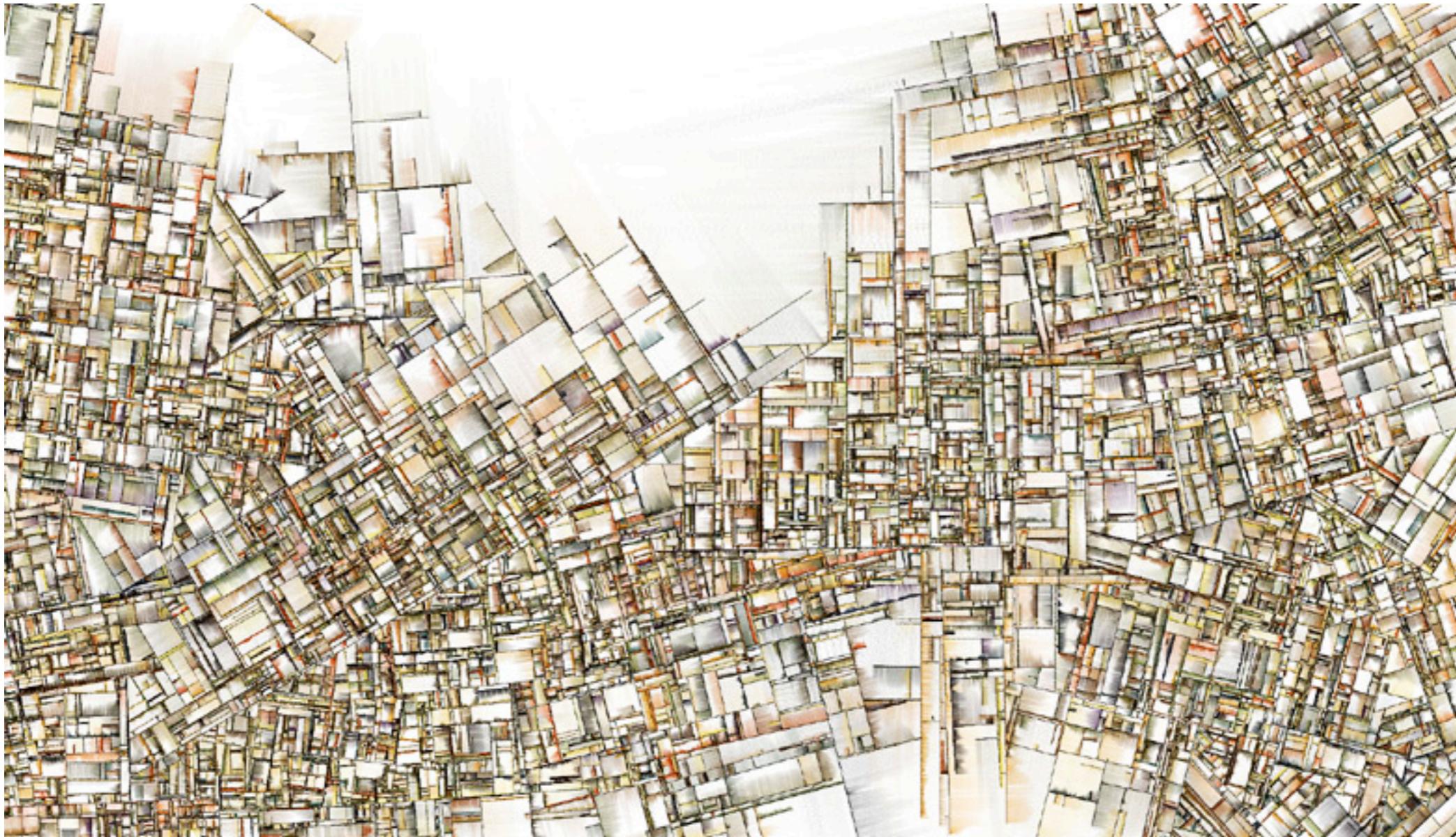
*write HTHTHTTHTTTHTHHHTHTH*

MORE  
RANDOM  
(LONGER)

from Kolmogorov, 1965

ANOTHER WAY OF THINKING ABOUT  
KOLMOGOROV'S APPROACH IS TO ASK ...

IS THERE A PATTERN TO THE SEQUENCE?



Jared Tarbell, Substrate, 2003

- INTRODUCTION: RESOURCES
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---

# OBJECTIVES

# Marcel Duchamp

## 3 Standard Stoppages

Paris 1913-14

In *3 Standard Stoppages* (*3 stoppages étalon*), Duchamp dropped three meter-long lengths of thread onto three stretched canvases, where they were then adhered, in order to preserve the random curves they assumed upon landing

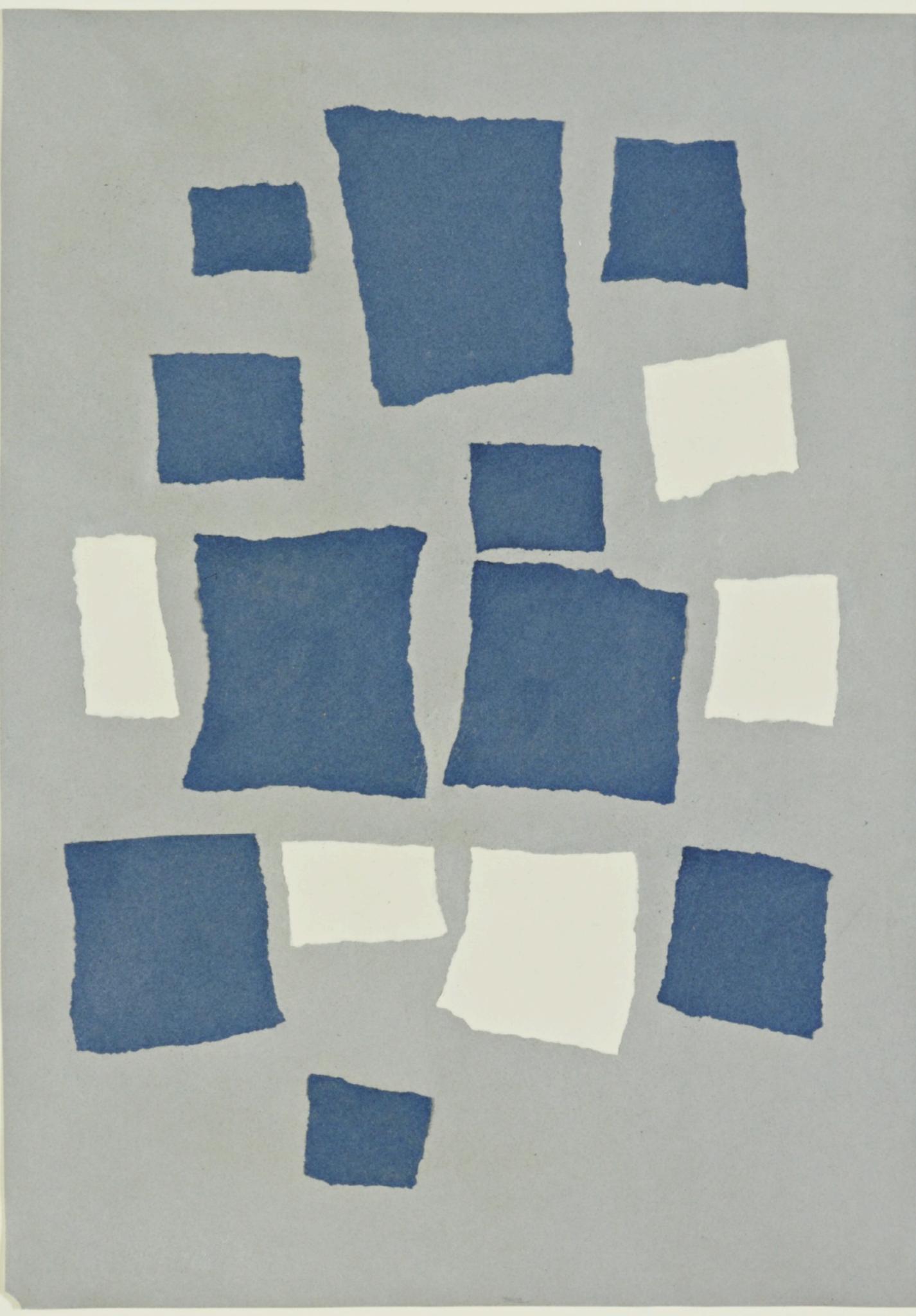


“

*If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane twisting as it pleases, [it] creates a new image of the unit of length...*

# DADA

In this and similar works, Dadaist Jean Arp played with random composition by dropping painted pieces of paper onto a surface, then gluing them into place...

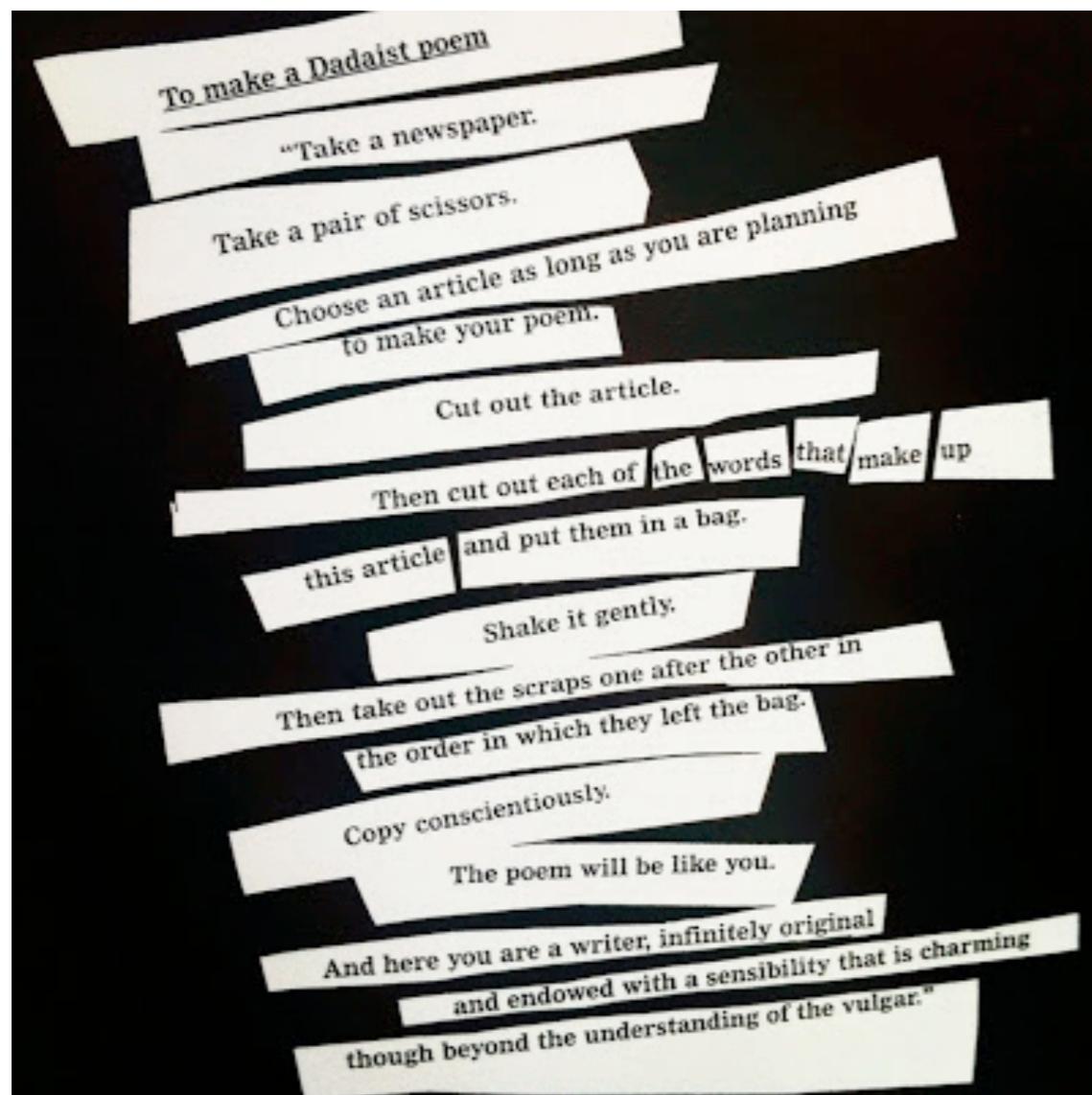


**Jean (Hans) Arp**

Untitled (Collage with Squares Arranged according to the Law of Chance)  
1916–17

# TO MAKE A DADAIST POEM

TRISTAN TZARA, 1951



## ASSESSMENT

voltaic arc of these two nerves that don't touch

near the heart

we note the black shivers under a lens  
is this feeling this white spouting

and methodical love  
splits my body into rays

toothpaste pastry

transatlantic  
tickets

*the crowds crash the column couched in wind*

range of rockets

on my head

*the bloody revenge of the liberated two-step*

directory of determinations at prix fixe

folly at 3:20 am

or 5.50 francs

cocaine slowly gnaws the walls for its pleasure

**satanic horoscope dilates under your vigor**

VIRGIL'S VIGILANCE VERIFIES THE VIRAL WIND

*eyes droop once more*



TRISTAN TZARA

# VERA MOLNAR

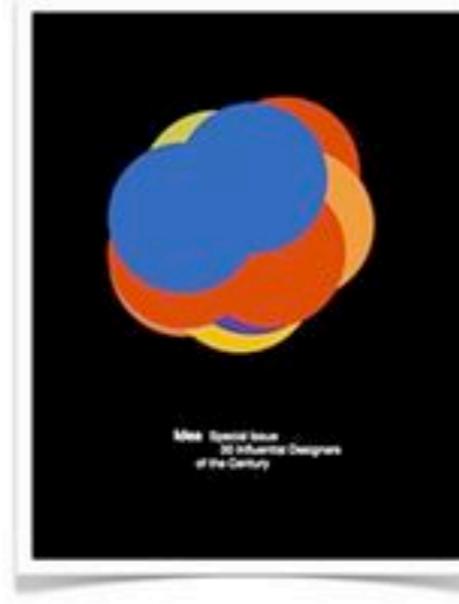
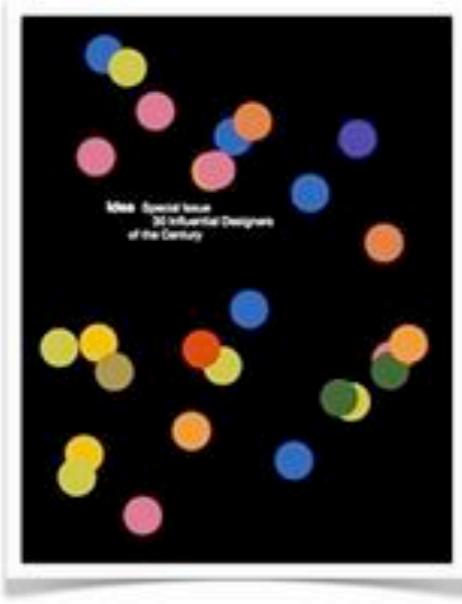
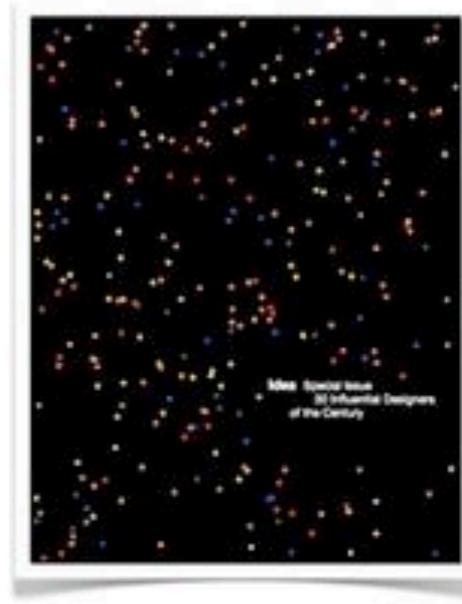
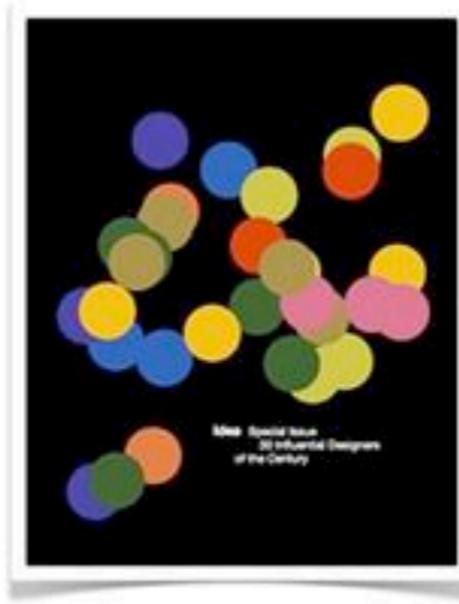
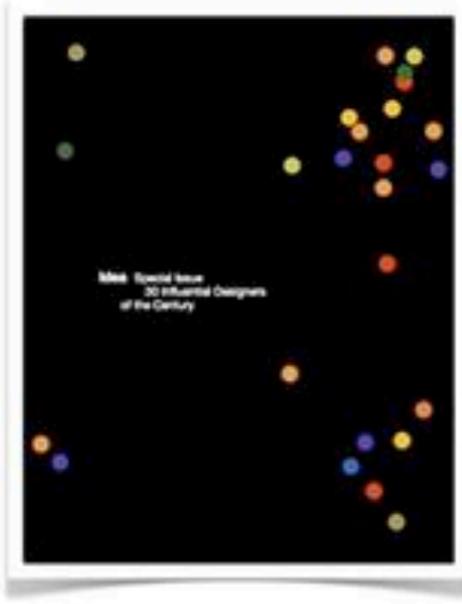
“*The machine, thought to be cold and inhuman, can help to realize what is most subjective, unattainable, and profound in a human being.*

-Vera Molnár

Vera Molnár (born 1924) is a French media artist of Hungarian origin. She is a pioneer of computer and generative art, active for over 75 years...

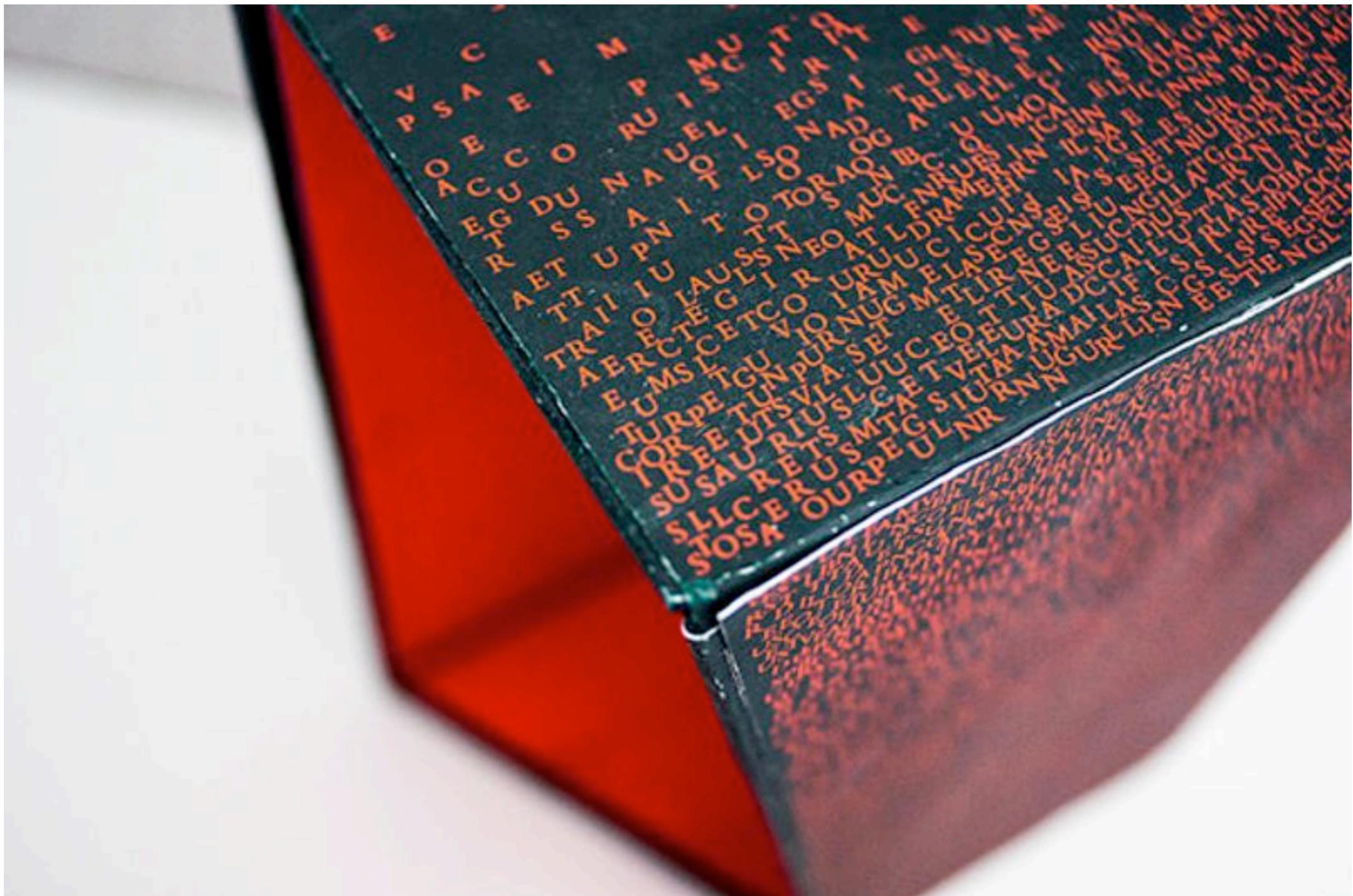


# RANDOMNESS IN DESIGN



Paul Rand

# RANDOMNESS IN DESIGN



Design by Zhusi Xie, for a John Cage novel

# MUSIC OF CHANGES

JOHN CAGE, 1951

“  
*the first sound composition  
to be largely determined by  
random procedures...*



*Music of Changes* for solo piano, composed by John Cage in 1951 for pianist and friend David Tudor, applied decisions made using the *I Ching*, a classical Chinese text commonly used as a divination system, to sounds durations, dynamics, tempo and densities.

# EMILY MASON

Abstract painter Emily Mason (1932–2019) used the laws of chance and gravity to create vital works with poured paint. She believed in chance operation, particularly as experienced in New York, where, she said, “you could be inspired by a tropical fruit in Chinatown and an exhibition on Byzantine art uptown...”



Emily Mason, *The Bullock Farm*, 1987, Oil on canvas

# TIM KNOWLES



Tim Knowles, Oak/Larch On Easel (2005)

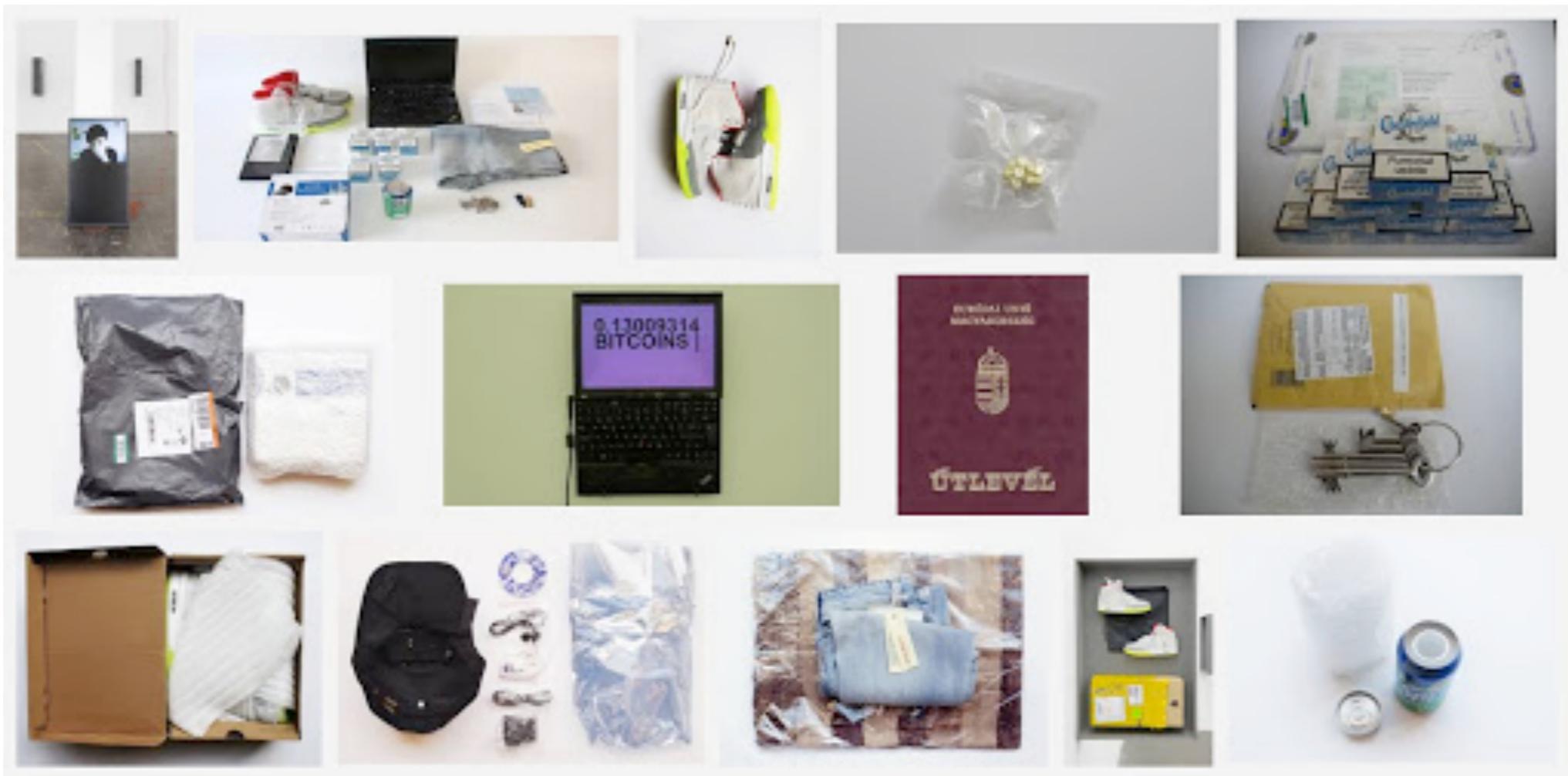
# CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

Schneemann's video *American I-Ching Apple Pie* (1977) incorporated the notion of chance as a ruling cosmological principle, associated with the *I-Ching*, to free women from the confines of both the kitchen and the rational recipe.

Schneemann chose her cooking tools randomly, including colanders, strainers, nails, hammers, arrows, and ball bearings, using chance and Eastern philosophy to break down traditional gender boundaries.



# RANDOMNESS AS CRITICAL INTERVENTION



AN ALGORITHM WITH A WEEKLY BUDGET OF \$100 IN BITCOIN, RANDOMLY PURCHASES ITEMS FROM THE DARK WEB, INCLUDING ECSTASY, A HUNGARIAN PASSPORT, AND A BASEBALL CAP WITH A BUILT-IN CAMERA...

IN JANUARY 2015, THE SWISS POLICE CONFISCATED THE ROBOT AND ITS ILLEGAL PURCHASES. THEN THREE MONTHS LATER, RETURNED ALL (MINUS THE ECSTASY)

- INTRODUCTION: RESOURCES
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- 

# OBJECTIVES

# WHY USE RANDOMNESS ?

- diminish authorial control
- avoid common habits of the artist
- add variation to predictable outputs
- create surprise (for author or audience)
- explore a possibility space (see Molnár)
- conceptual or critical strategies

TO DARE EVERY DAY TO BE IRREVERENT AND BOLD.  
TO DARE TO PRESERVE THE RANDOMNESS OF MIND  
WHICH IN CHILDREN PRODUCES STRANGE AND  
WONDERFUL NEW THOUGHTS AND FORMS. TO  
CONTINUALLY SCRAMBLE THE FAMILIAR AND  
BRING THE OLD INTO NEW JUXTAPOSITION.

---

GORDON WEBBER

- INTRODUCTION: RESOURCES
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---

# OBJECTIVES

# RANDOM WALK

sketch.js\*

```
let x = 200, y = 200;

function setup() {
    createCanvas(400, 400);
    noStroke();
}

function draw() {
    x += random(-3, 3);
    y += random(-3, 3);

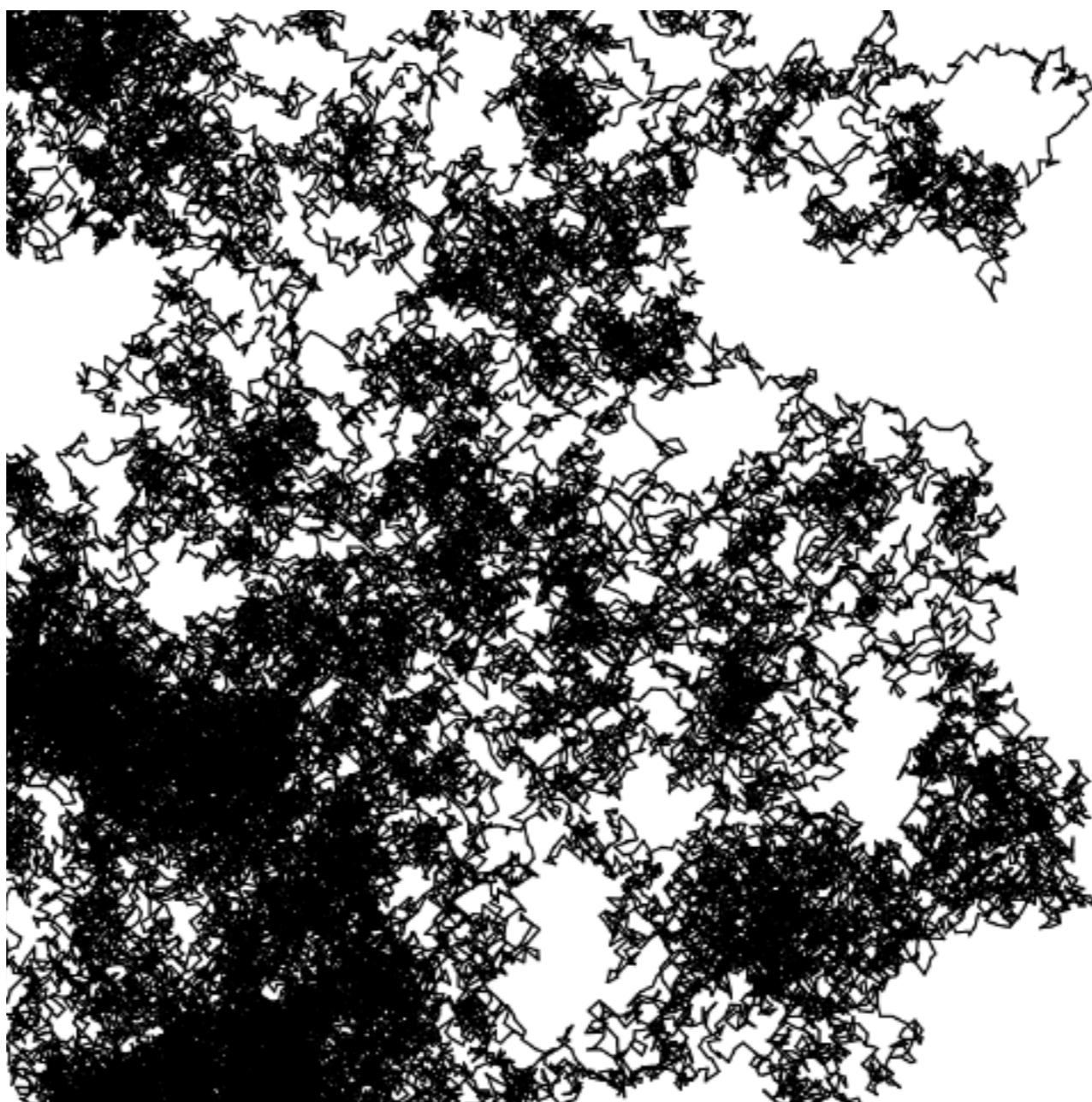
    background(255);
    fill(50);
    circle(x, y, 20);
}
```

Preview



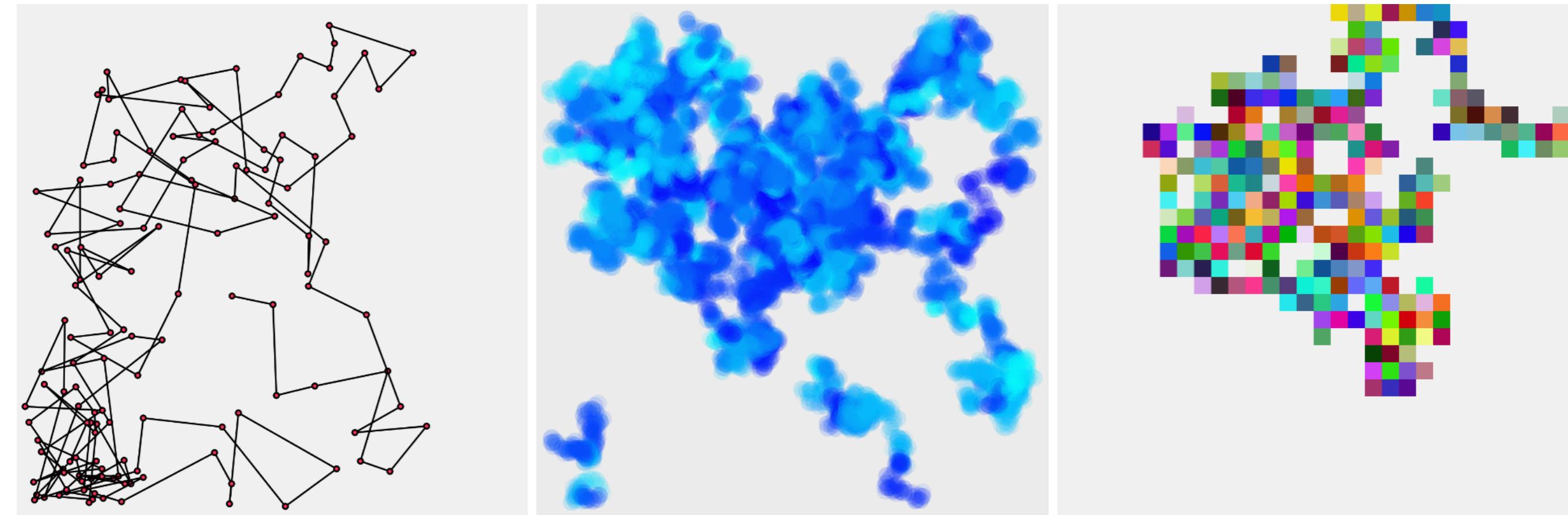
One of the most common techniques using randomness is the *random walk*, which shows up in a ranges of real-world contexts, from the movement of financial asset prices, to the paths of particles in quantum physics...

# RANDOM WALK



a single random walker over thousands of steps...

# RANDOM WALK

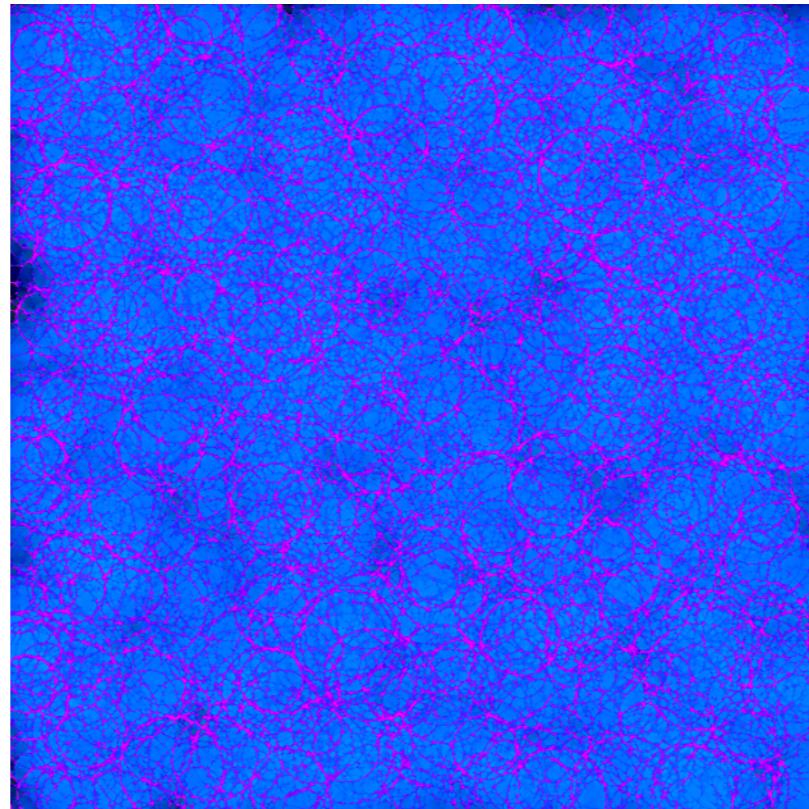


*visualizing random walks...*

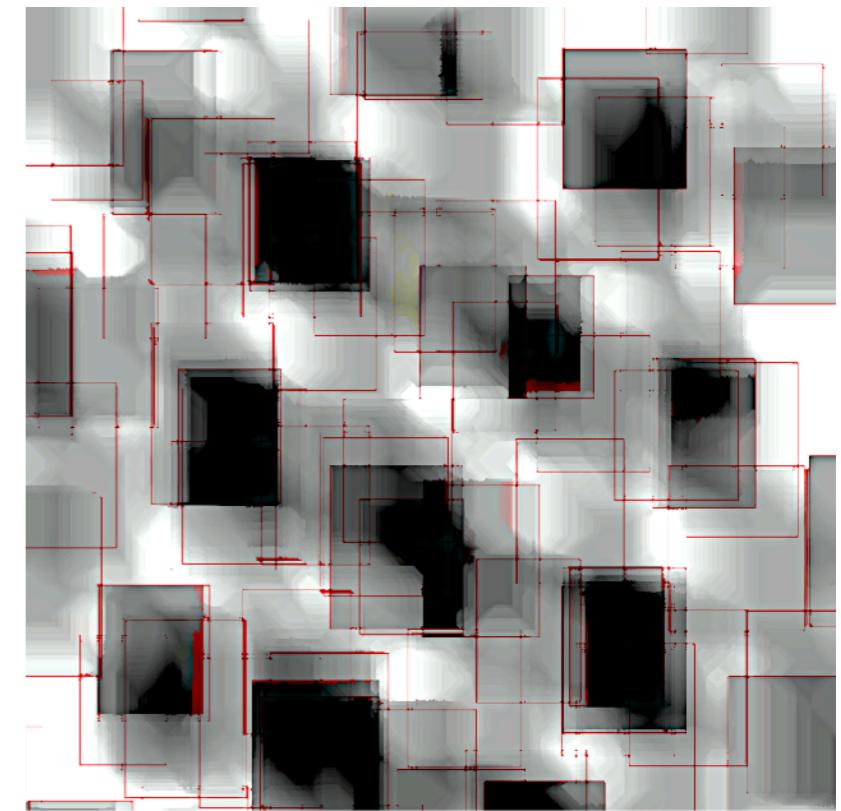
# MULTIPLE RANDOM WALKS



as circles



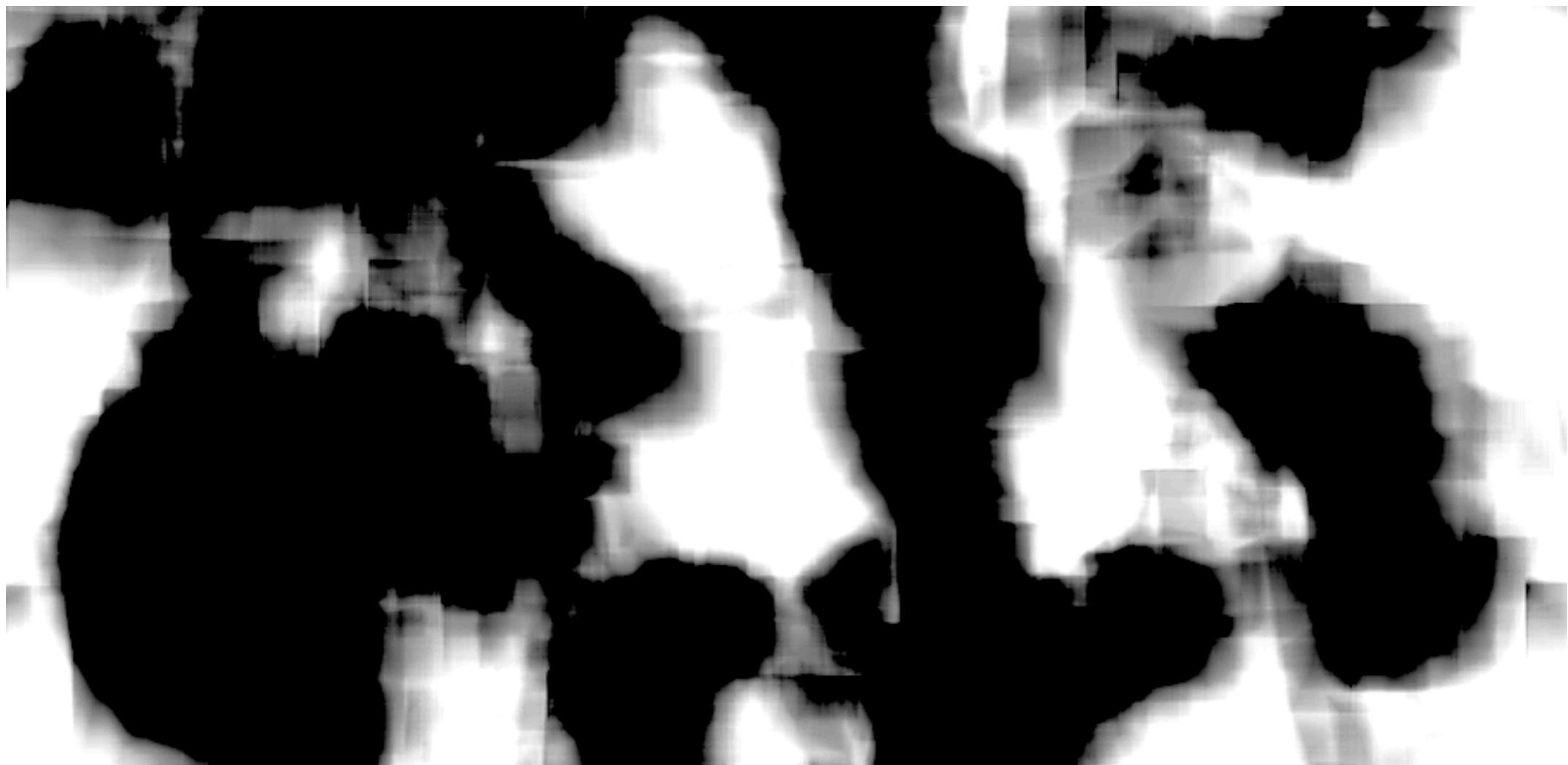
on a grid



as rectangles

*random walkers interacting ...*

# MULTIPLE RANDOM WALKS



*multiple random walkers interacting ...*

# RECODING

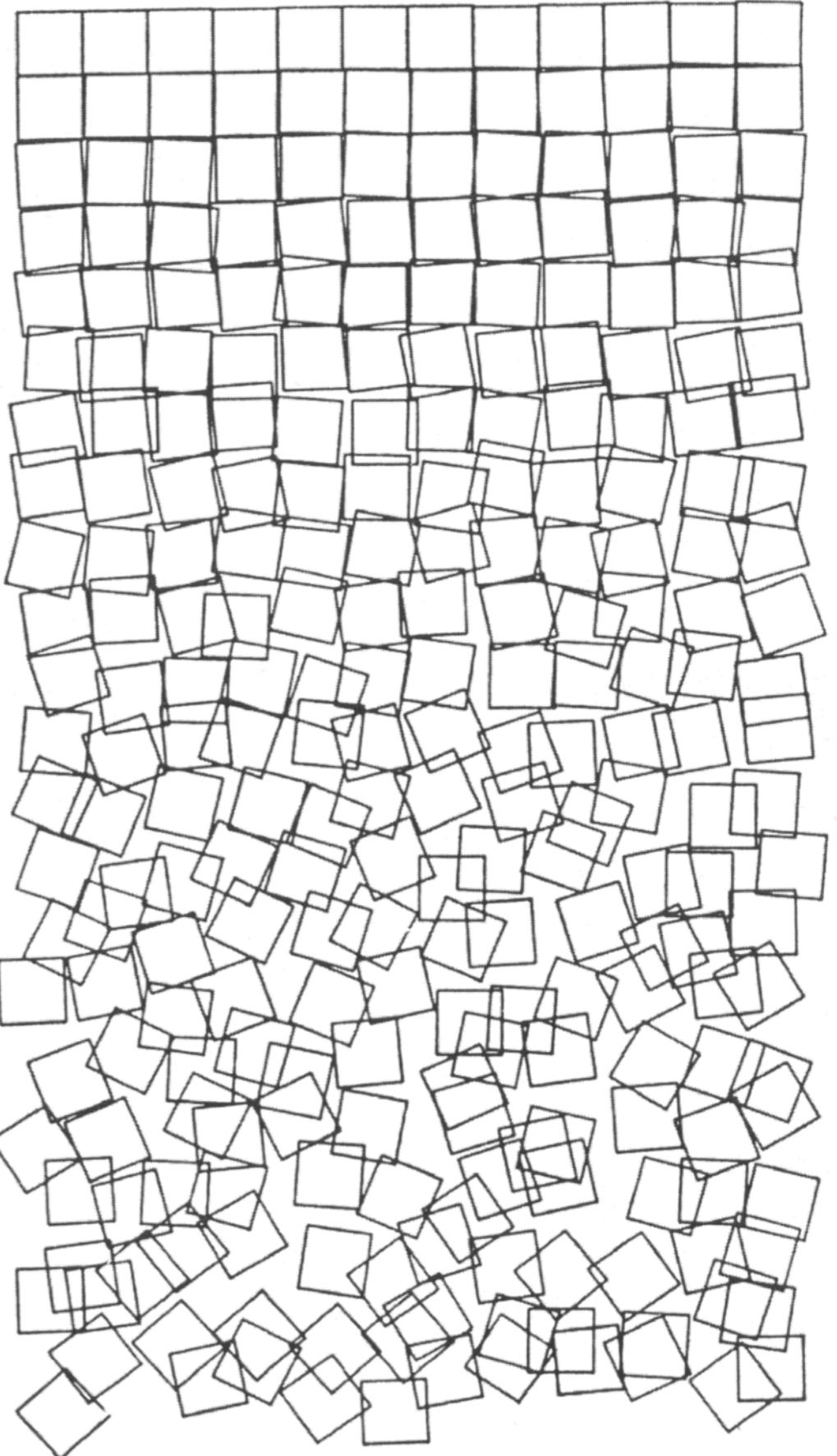
COPYING DIRECTLY FROM WORKS OF ART GIVES THE ARTIST INSIGHT INTO THE CREATIVE PROCESS: INSIGHTS WHICH CANNOT BE LEARNED FROM ANY OTHER SOURCE.

---

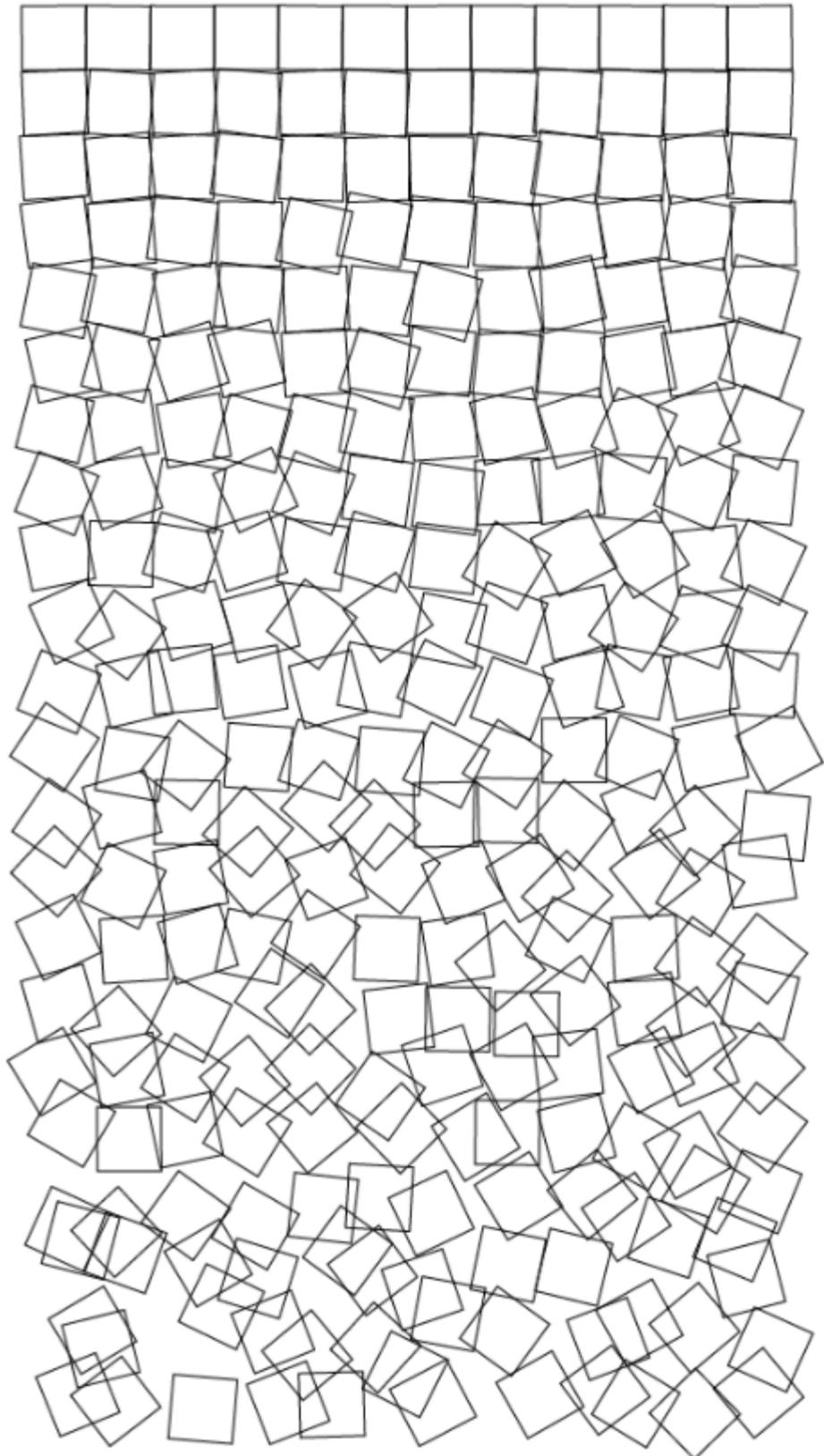
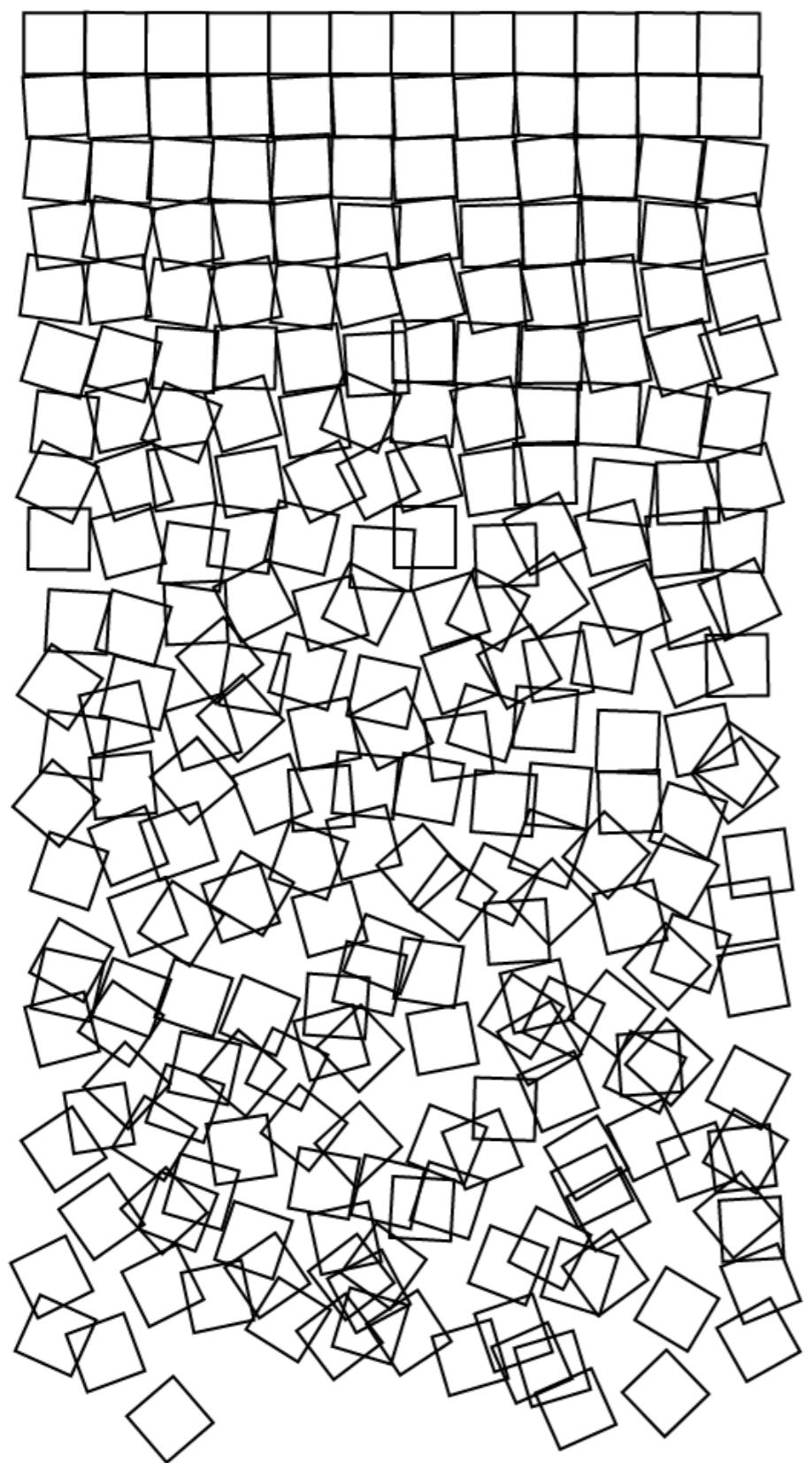
- GERALD KING

**LET'S DESCRIBE THIS WORK  
AS CONCISELY AS WE CAN,  
USING PLAIN ENGLISH...**

**?**



*Schotter (Gravel)* - Georg Nees, 1968



Recode of *Schotter (Gravel)* by Georg Nees, 2021

```
let sqSz = 20;

function setup() {
  createCanvas(400, 600);
  noFill();
  background(255);
  translate(width/5, height/8);

  for (let i = 0; i < 12; i++) {
    for (let j = 0; j < 22; j++) {

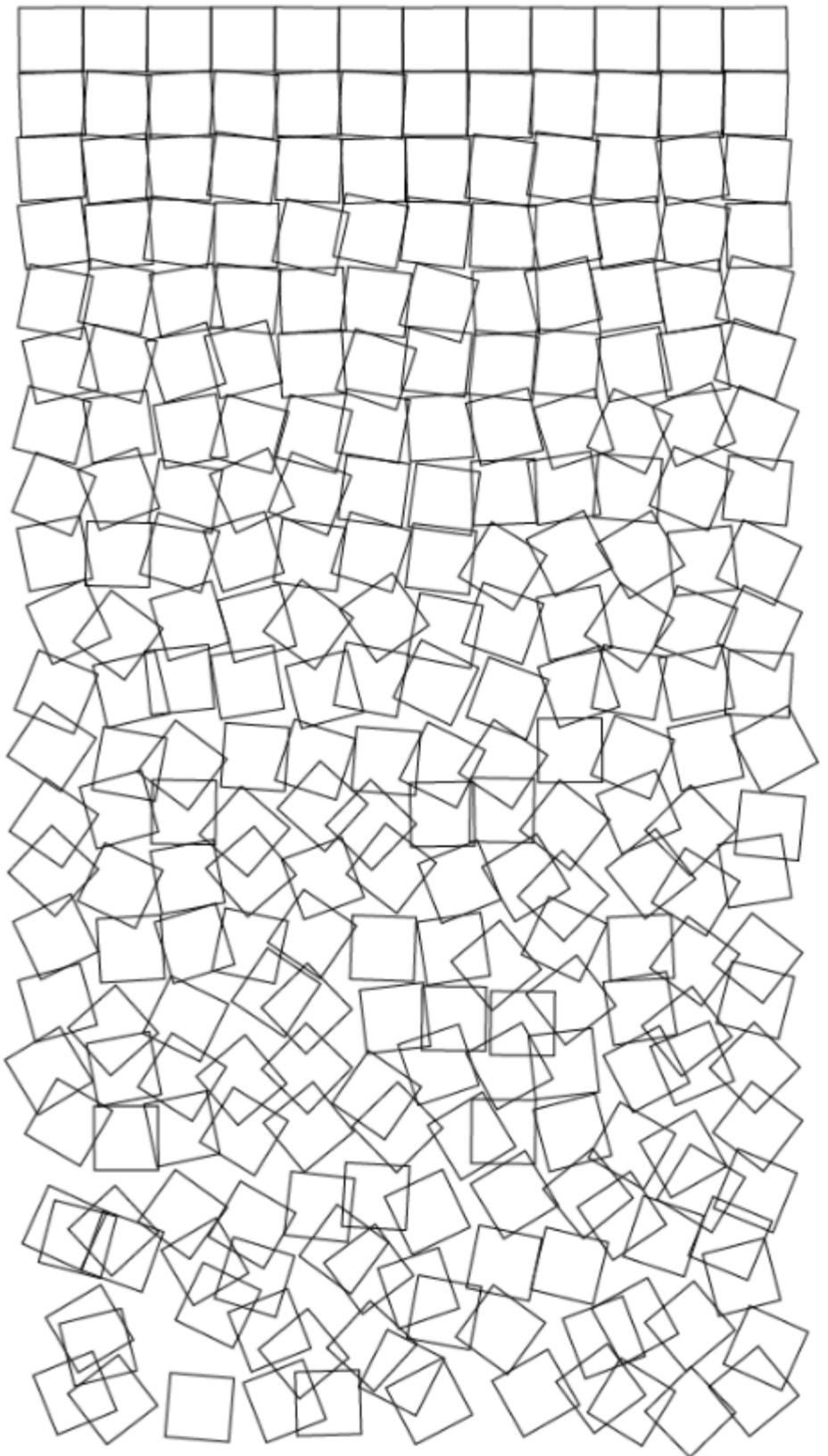
      let displace = max(j, 0.2);
      let randRot = random(-4, 4) * displace;
      let randShift = random() * displace;

      translate(i * sqSz, j * sqSz);
      rotate(radians(randRot));

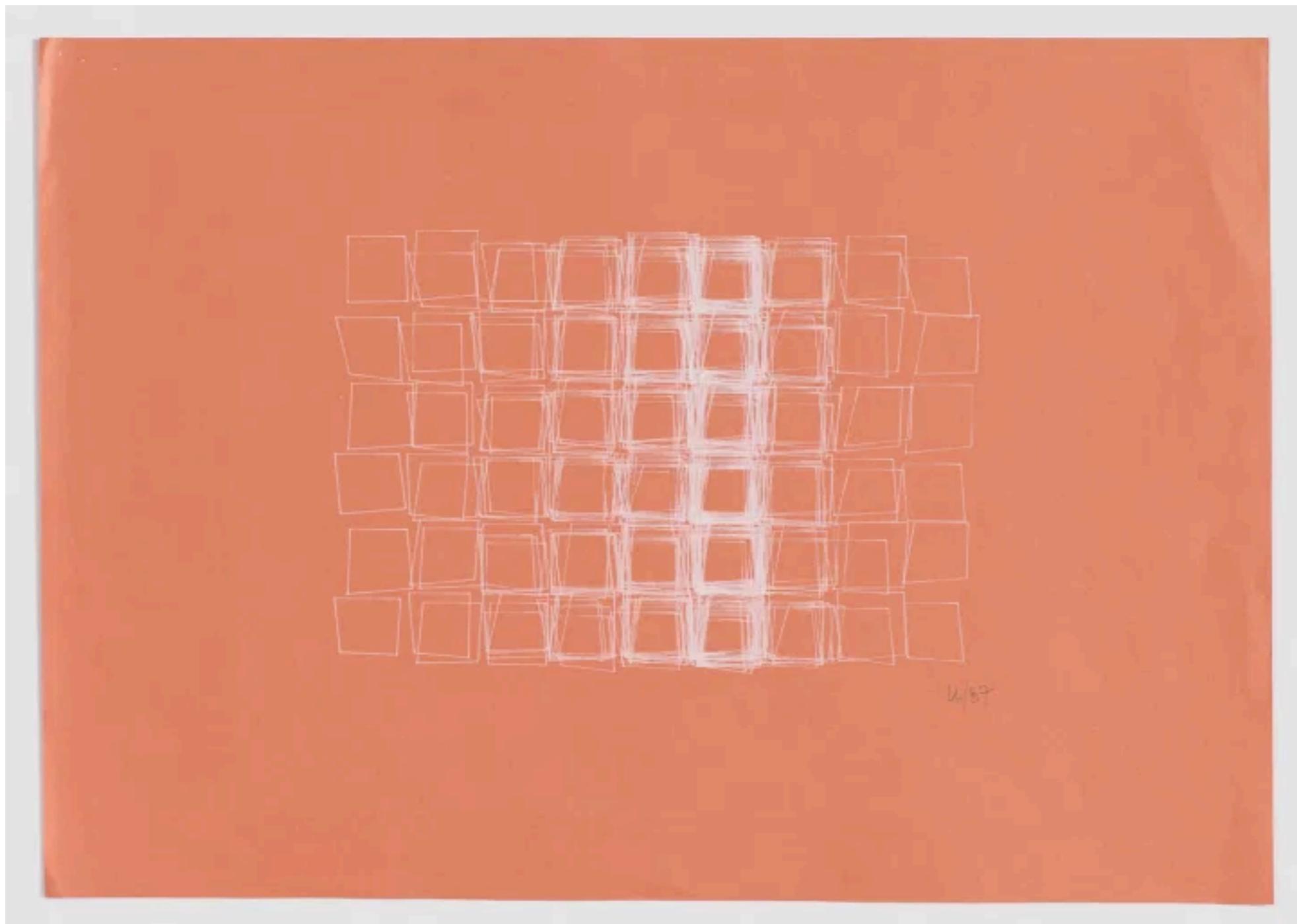
      square(-sqSz / 2 + randShift, -sqSz / 2 + randShift, sqSz);

      rotate(radians(-randRot));
      translate(-i * sqSz, -j * sqSz);
    }
  }
}
```

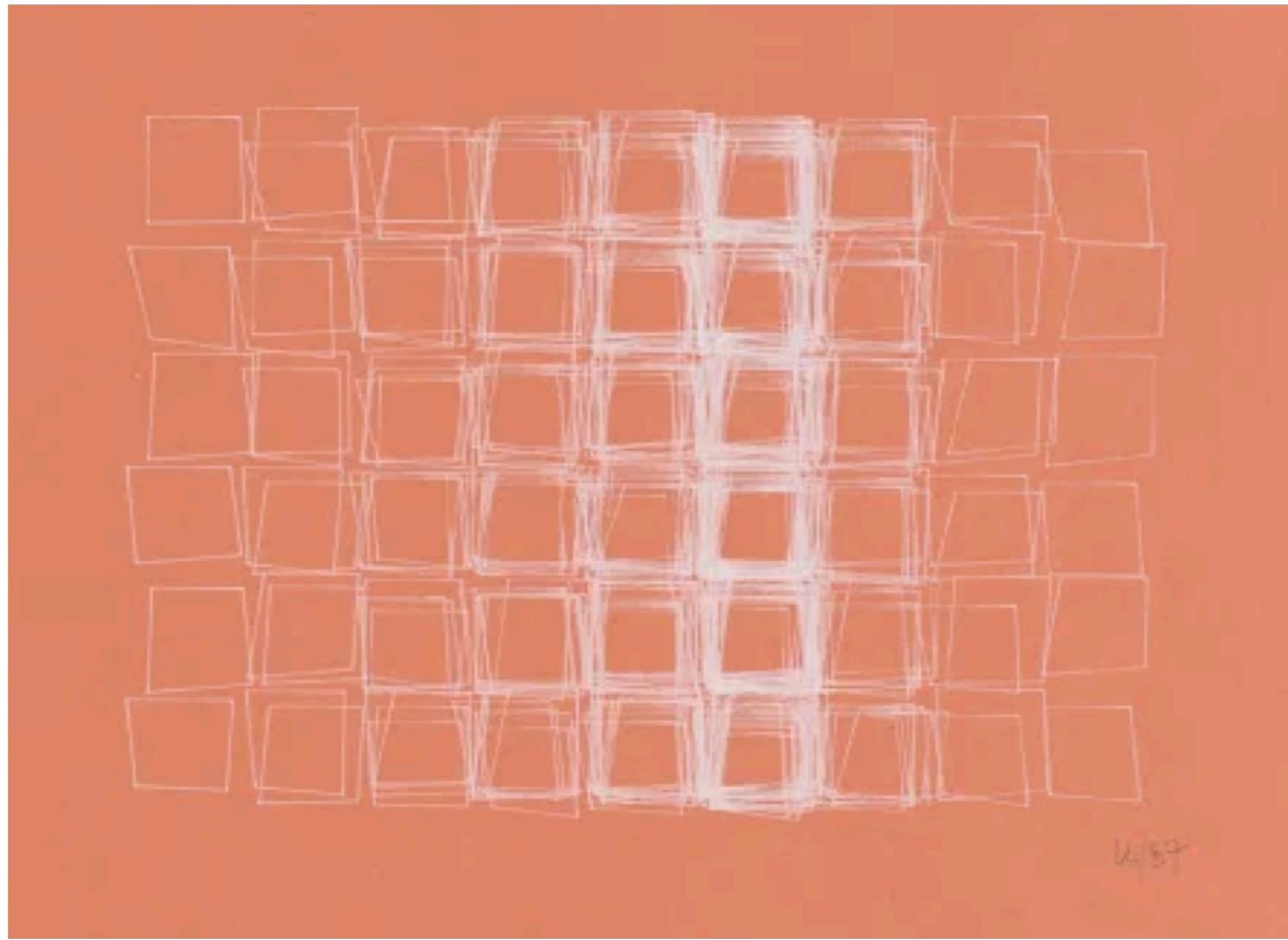
file: Recode-Schotter.js



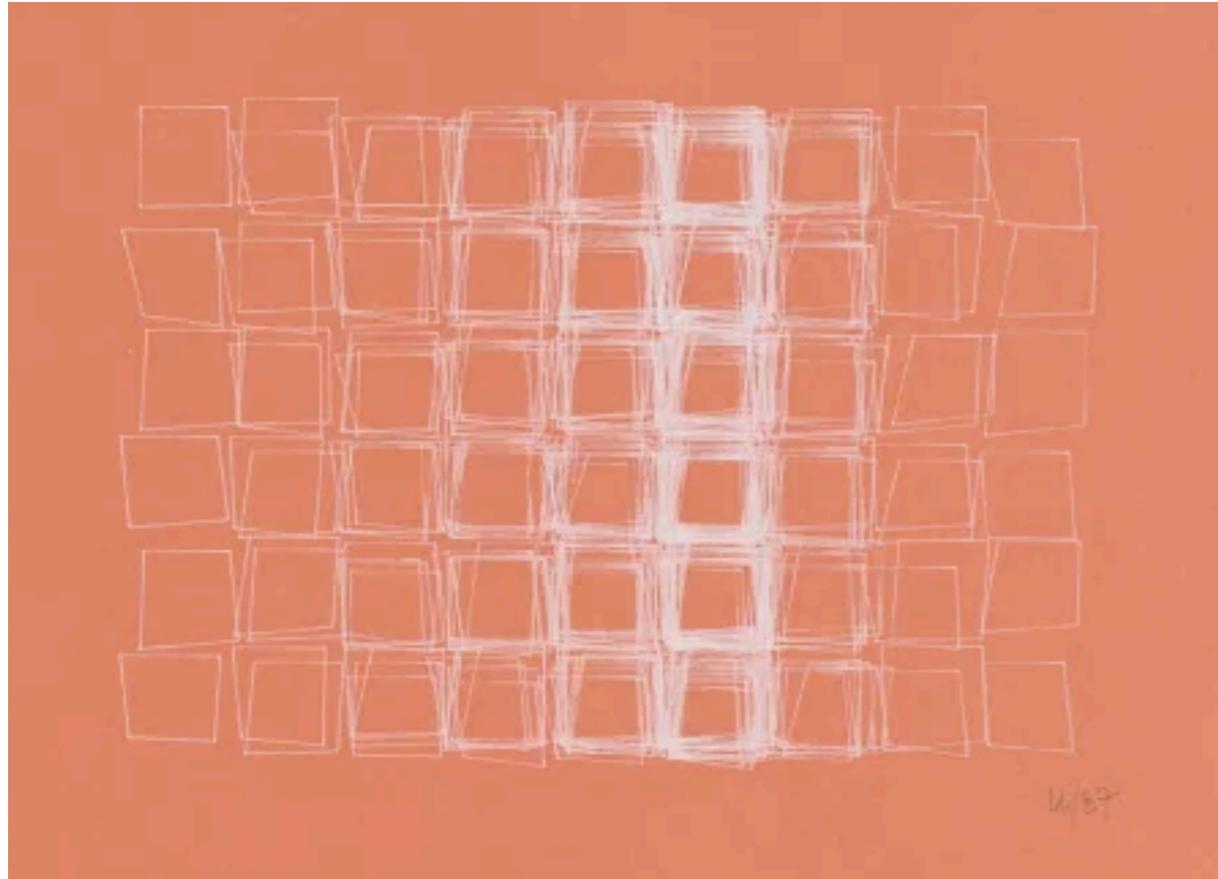
Recode of Schotter (*Gravel*) by Georg Nees, 2021



VERA MOLNAR “STRUCTURE DE QUADRILATERES” (1987)

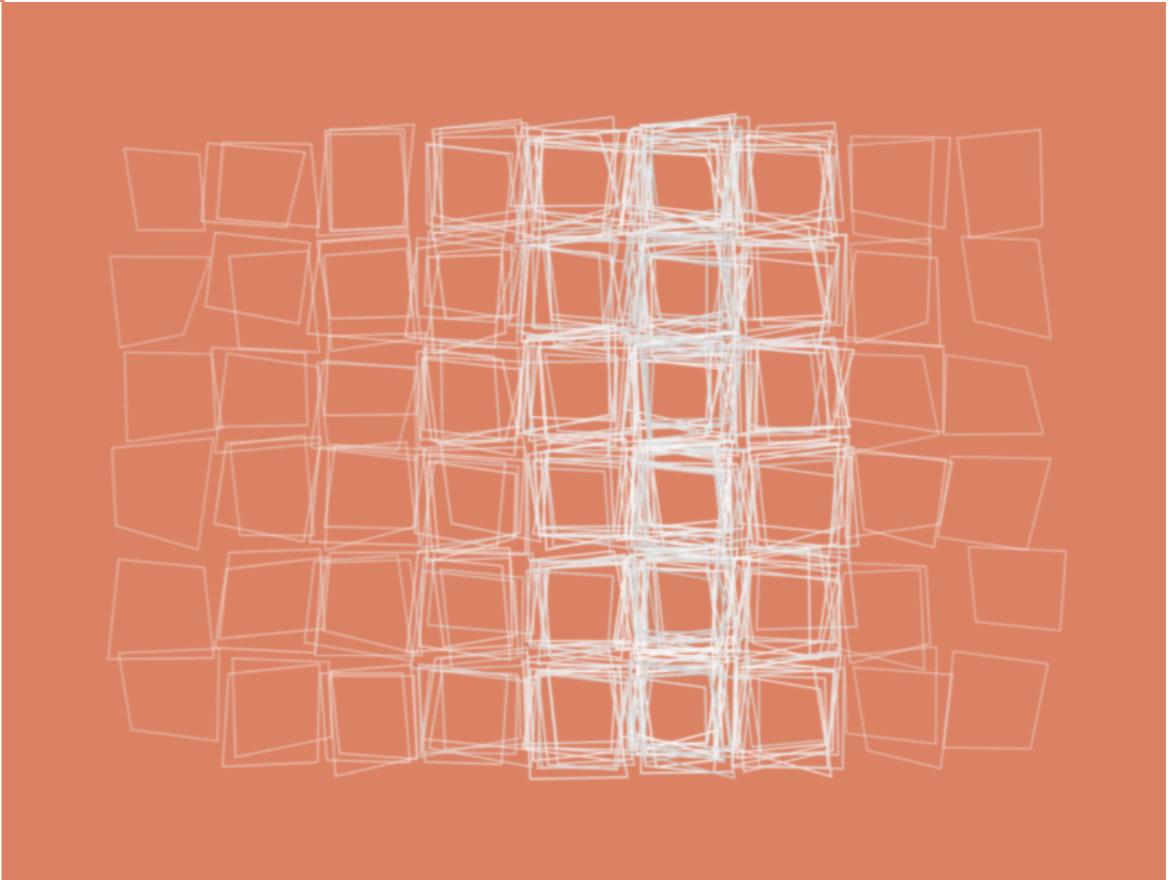


- white lines on a salmon-colored background
- a grid of squares, this time with 9 columns and 6 rows
- moving from left to right, the number of quads in each column increases, reaching a max in the 6th column, and then decreasing again...
- each of the 4 points in the square is randomly offset from its position (thus making the squares into quadrilaterals)



ORIGINAL

RECODE



VERA MOLNAR "STRUCTURE DE QUADRILATERES" (1987)

```

let sz = 50, k = 8;
let num = [1,2,3,6,10,18,9,2,1];

function setup() {

  createCanvas(690, 520);
  background(222, 133, 103);
  noFill();

  for (let i = 0; i++ < 6; ) {
    for (let j = 0; j++ < 9; ) {
      for (let h = 0; h < num[j-1]; h++) {

        let x1 = 50 + j * 60 - sz / 2 + random(-k, k);
        let y1 = 50 + i * 60 - sz / 2 + random(-k, k);

        let x2 = x1 + sz + random(-k, k);
        let y2 = y1 + random(-k, k);

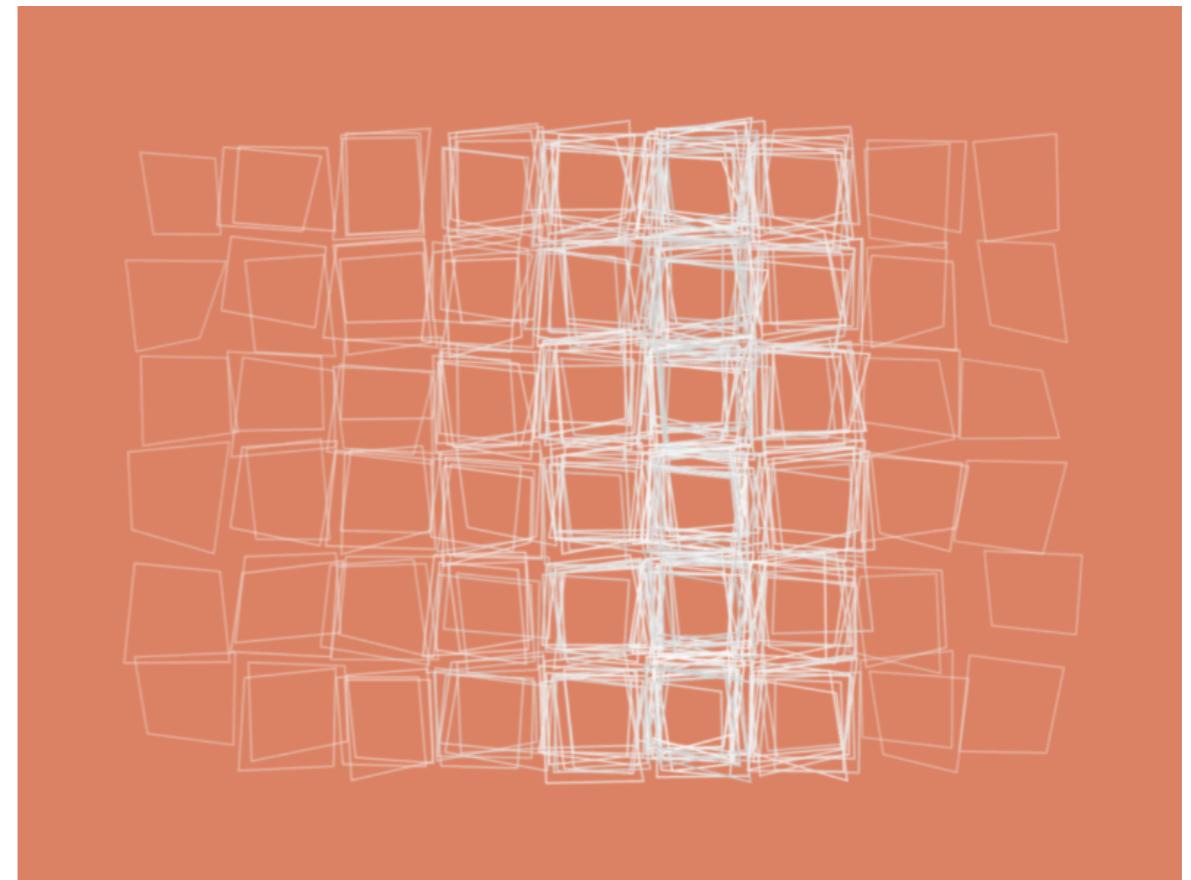
        let x3 = x1 + sz + random(-k, k);
        let y3 = y1 + sz + random(-k, k);

        let x4 = x1 + random(-k, k);
        let y4 = y1 + sz + random(-k, k);

        stroke(random(240-num[j-1]*2, 255), 100+num[j-1]*12);
        quad(x1, y1, x2, y2, x3, y3, x4, y4);
      }
    }
  }
}

```

file: [Recode-Quads.js](#)



RECODE OF VERA MOLNAR “STRUCTURE DE QUADRILATERES” (1987)

LIFE CANNOT BE CALCULATED. THAT'S THE BIG MISTAKE OUR CIVILIZATION MADE. WE NEVER ACCEPTED THAT RANDOMNESS IS NOT A MISTAKE IN THE EQUATION - IT IS PART OF THE EQUATION.

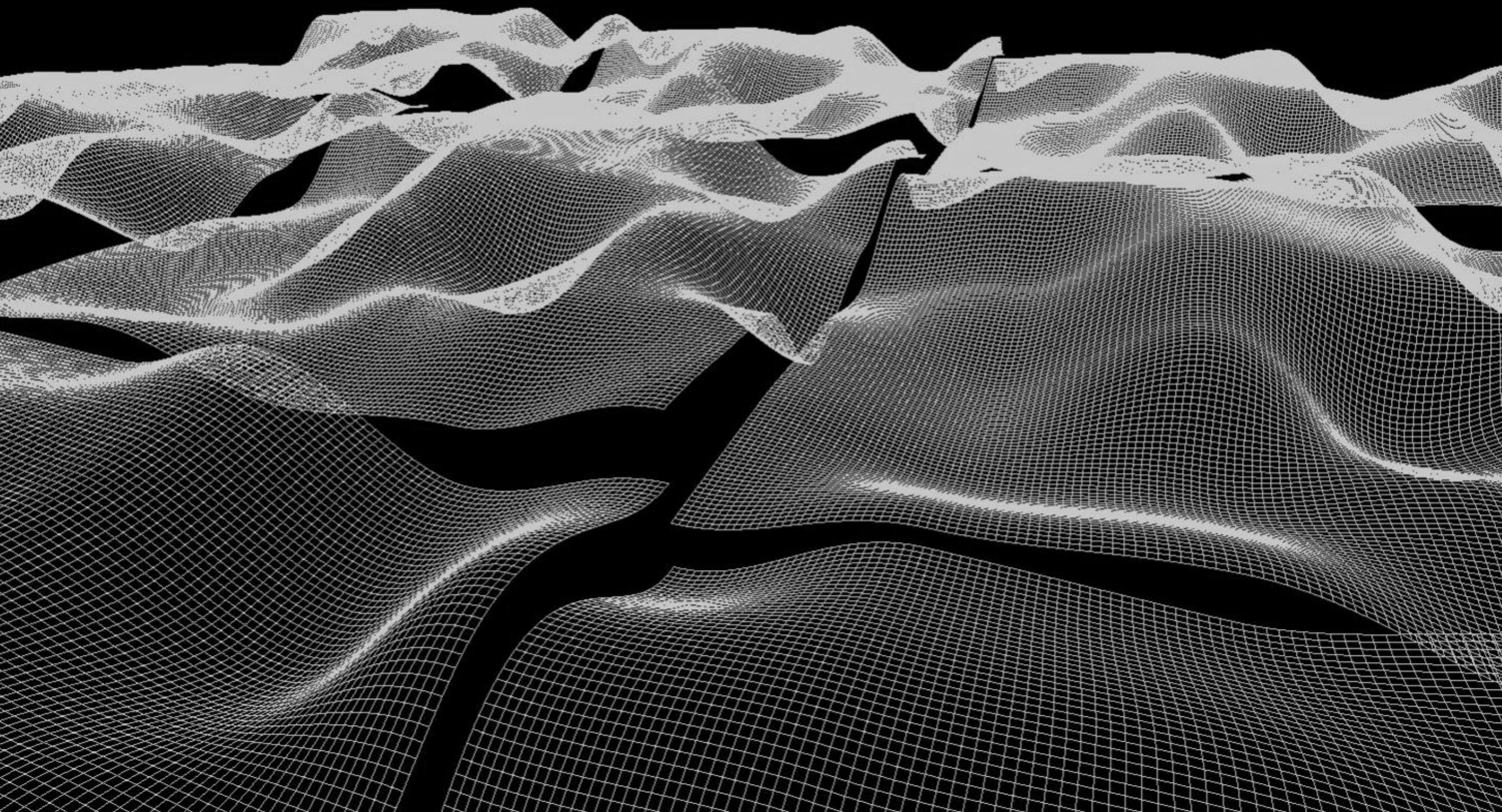
---

JEANETTE WINTERSON

- INTRODUCTION ...
  - THEORETICAL: DEFINITIONS
  - AESTHETIC: EXAMPLES IN ART
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  - PRACTICAL: USING RANDOMNESS ...
- 

## WRAPUP

# THE NOISE() FUNCTION



**END**

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