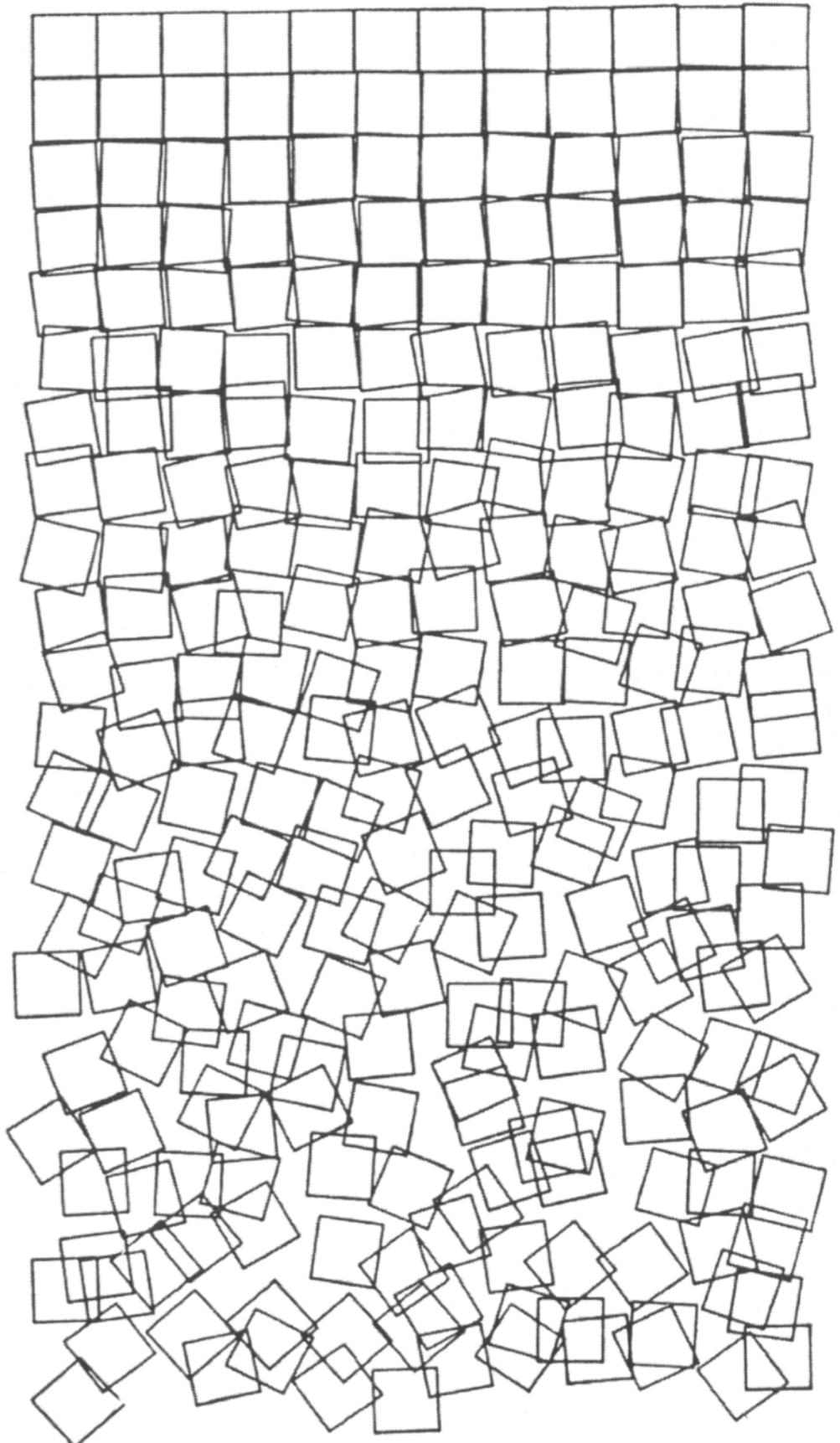


# RANDOMNESS & CREATIVE CODE

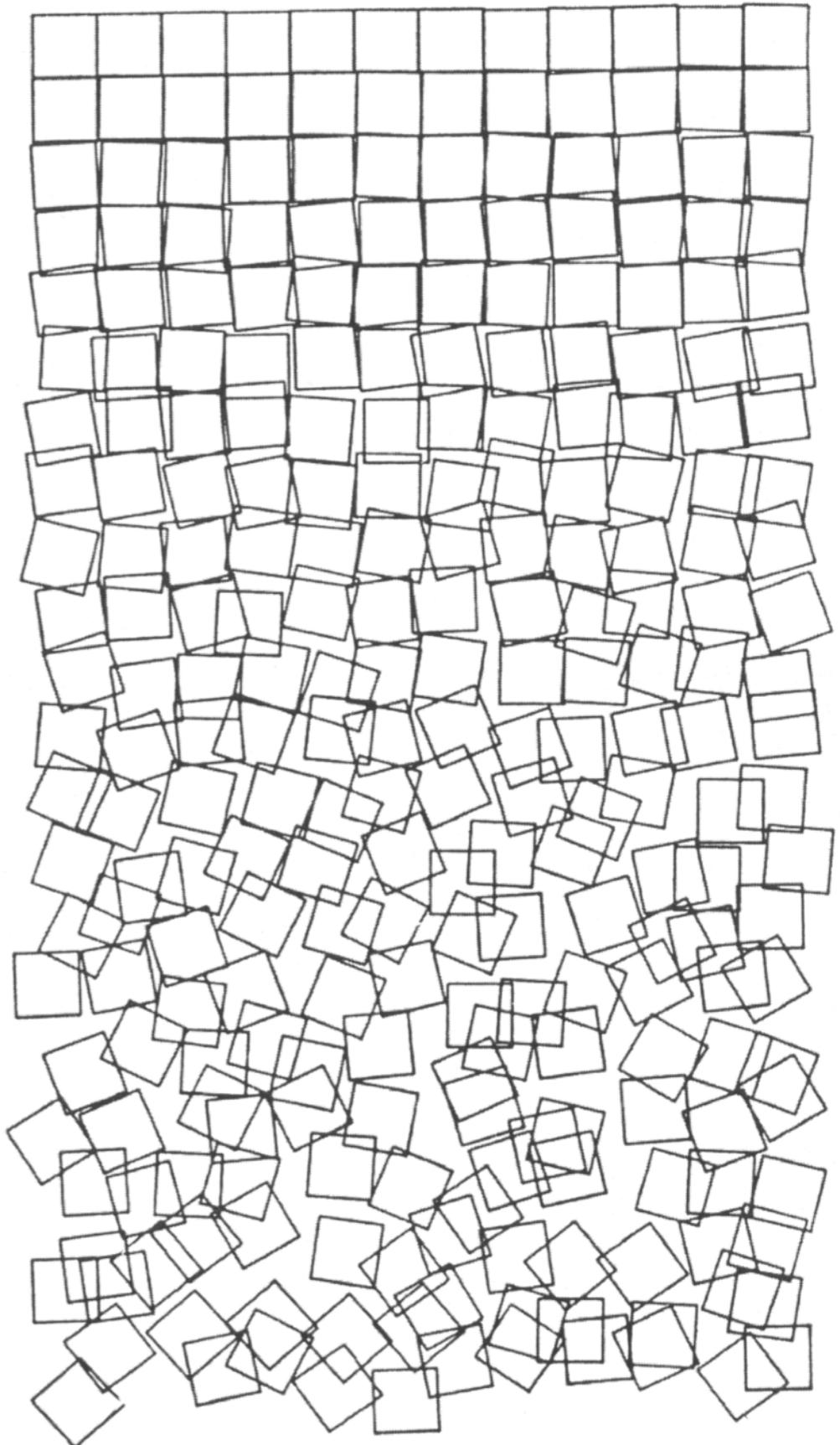
DANIEL C. HOWE  
COMPUTING @ GOLDSMITHS  
FRI, JANUARY 20, 2023



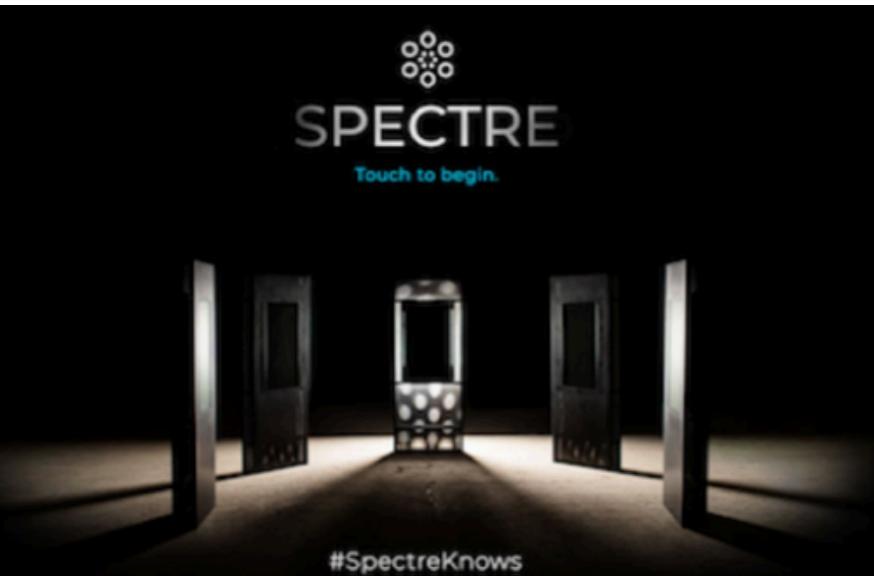
*Schotter (Gravel)* - Georg Nees, 1968

# RANDOMNESS & CREATIVE CODE

DANIEL C. HOWE  
COMPUTING @ GOLDSMITHS  
FRI, JANUARY 20, 2023



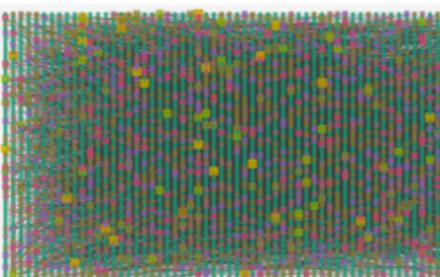
*Schotter (Gravel)* - Georg Nees, 1968



**SPECTRE**

Touch to begin.

#SpectreKnows



SUBSCRIBE NOW LOG IN

Does the virtual city have a dump, or is it just a bunch of this Ad?



**VICE** Watch News Tech Politics Food Drugs Entertainment Health + More

## The Zuckerberg Deepfake Heard Around the World

The deepfake of Mark Zuckerberg was perhaps the biggest troll of Facebook in recent memory, but will it change anything?

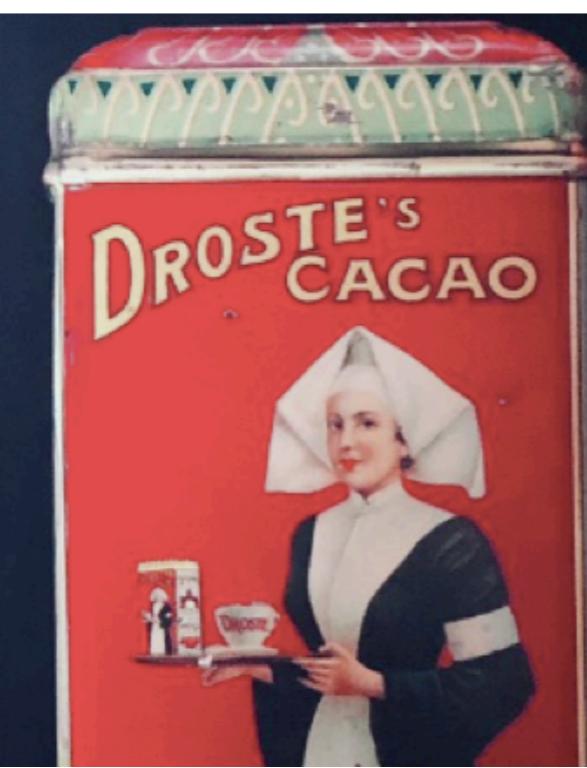
**ZUCKERBERG:** WE'RE INCREASING TRANSPARENCY ON ADS

**FACEBOOK**

imming back alone to the bathing rock, head under, reaches out to grasp the familiar ledge, a fold in the  
e-tinged granite just above the surface of the  
ist-deep water at its edge, by the stone which he can  
clearly though unfocused through the lake water.  
t he has not reached it yet his expectant hand breaks  
e surface, down through 'empty' water and his  
uckles graze the rock, his face will not rise up,  
pping and gasping, out of the water; instead, it 'falls'  
ward and, momentarily, down, into the shallows;  
miles, breathes a choking mouthful, which he



desperate course was to ask a fellow pro  
of mine to trace Ah-Q through his crimin  
ord. [REDACTED] got  
[REDACTED] 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



DANIEL C HOWE  
SCHOOL OF CREATIVE MEDIA  
CITY UNIVERSITY HONG KONG  
MAIL: DANIEL@REDNOISE.ORG  
[HTTPS://REDNOISE.ORG/DANIEL](https://rednoise.org/daniel)

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

---

LALI BARRIÈRE

**IMAGINE A SITUATION IN WHICH A DESIGN STUDENT IS ASKED “WHY IS THAT SHAPE GREEN?” AND THE RESPONSE IS “THAT COLOR WAS GENERATED RANDOMLY...”**

---

CARL LOSTRITTO

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

# OBJECTIVES

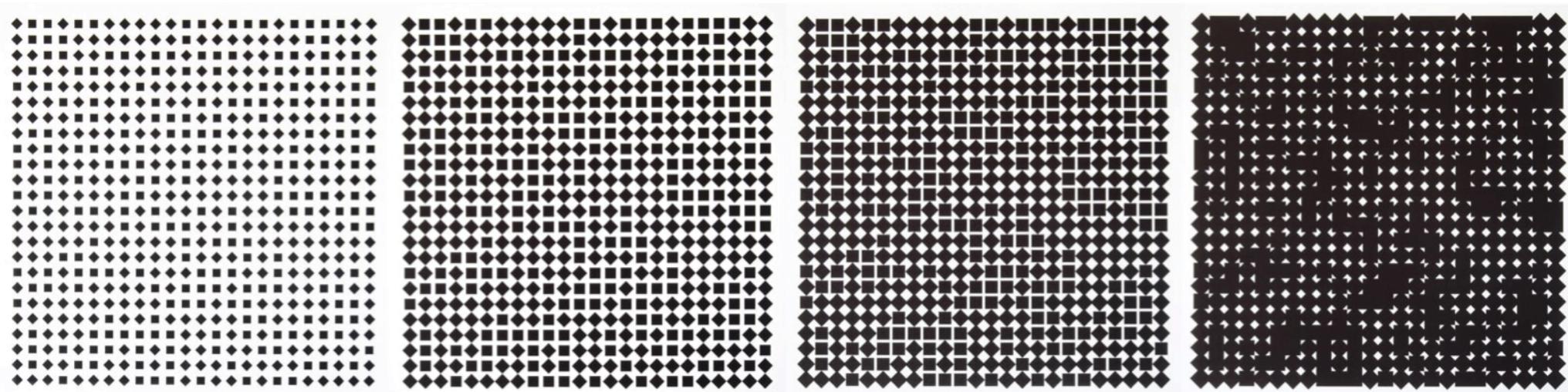
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- 

# 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`, `RandomRects.js`, `RandomWalk1.js`, `RandomWalk2.js`, `Recode-Quads.js`, `Recode-Schotter.js`, `randomness.png`, and `slides.pdf`. The most recent commit was made 15 seconds ago. Below the commit history is the `README.md` file, which contains the following content:

```
A micro-workshop on randomness

Resources

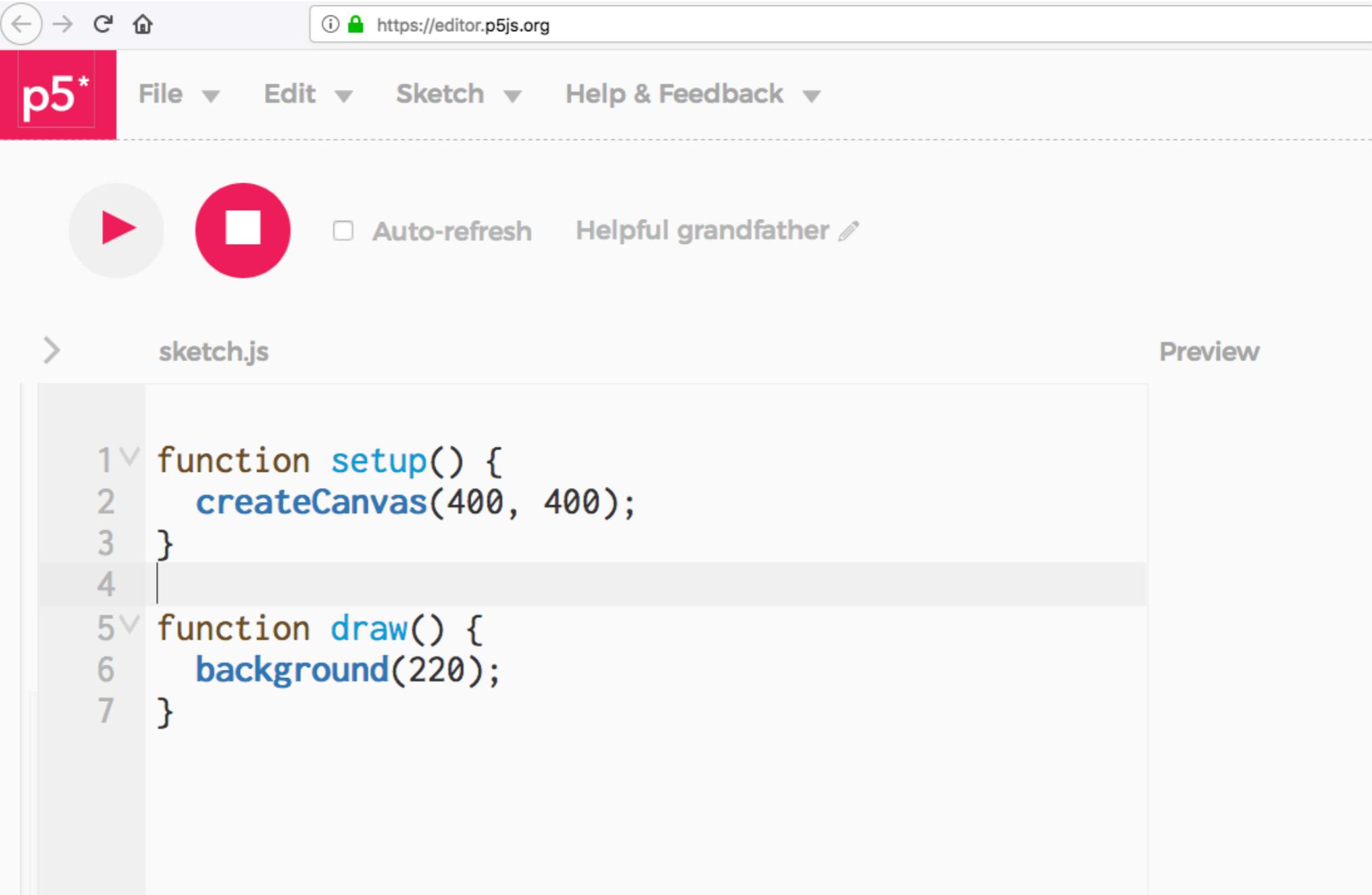

- Lecture slides (.pdf)
- p5.js editor and reference
- Vera Molnar on randomness (2-min video)

```

A red arrow points from the bottom of the `Resources` list to the URL at the bottom of the page.

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

# TOOLS: P5.JS EDITOR



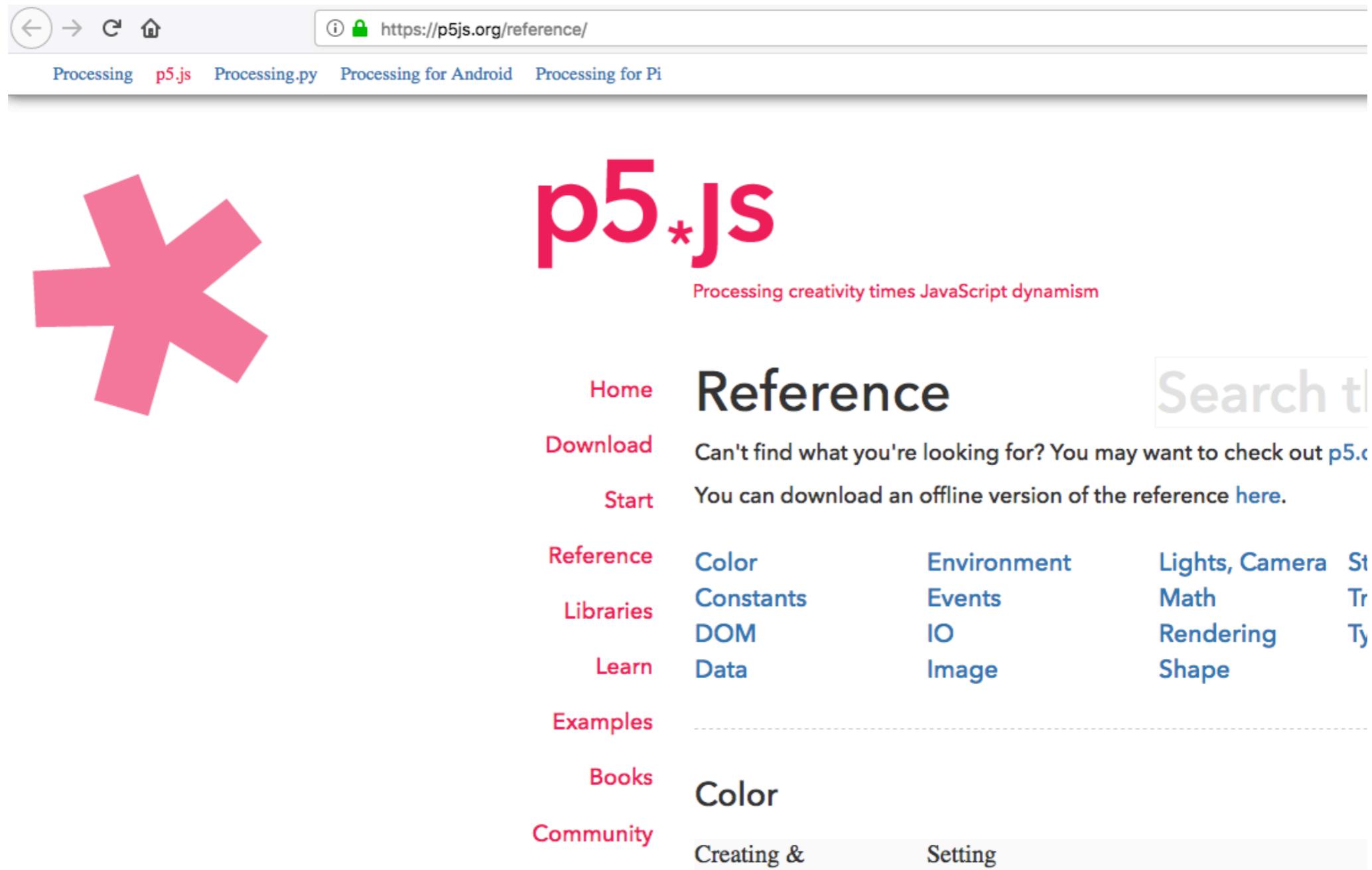
The screenshot shows the p5.js Editor interface. At the top, there's a browser-style header with back/forward buttons, a refresh button, and a URL field showing <https://editor.p5js.org>. Below the header is a navigation bar with the p5 logo, File, Edit, Sketch, and Help & Feedback menus. To the right of the menu are two large buttons: a grey play button with a red triangle and a red square button with a white square. Next to these buttons are checkboxes for "Auto-refresh" and "Helpful grandfather" with a pencil icon. The main area is divided into two sections: a code editor on the left and a preview panel on the right. The code editor contains the following JavaScript code:

```
1 function setup() {
2   createCanvas(400, 400);
3 }
4
5 function draw() {
6   background(220);
7 }
```

The preview panel is currently empty, indicated by a light grey background.

<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 in a large, bold, pink font, with the subtitle "Processing creativity times JavaScript dynamism" in smaller pink text 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". Below the "Reference" link, there's a table with categories: Color, Environment, Lights, Camera, etc. Under "Color", there are links for "Creating &" and "Setting".

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

# p5.js

Processing creativity times JavaScript dynamism

Home Reference

Download Can't find what you're looking for? You may want to check out [p5.js](#).

Start You can download an offline version of the reference [here](#).

Reference

Color	Environment	Lights, Camera	St
Constants	Events	Math	Tr
DOM	IO	Rendering	Ty
Data	Image	Shape	

Libraries

Learn

Examples

Books

Community

Color

Creating & Setting

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

# RANDOM()

## Description

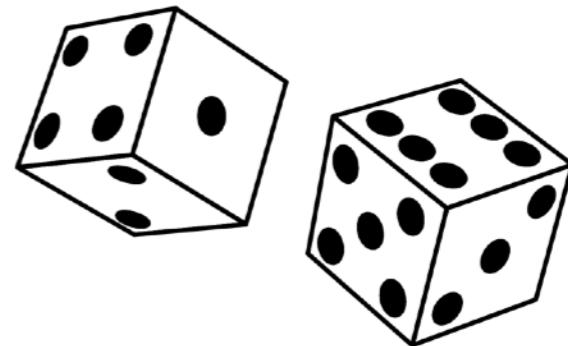
Return a random floating-point number.

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

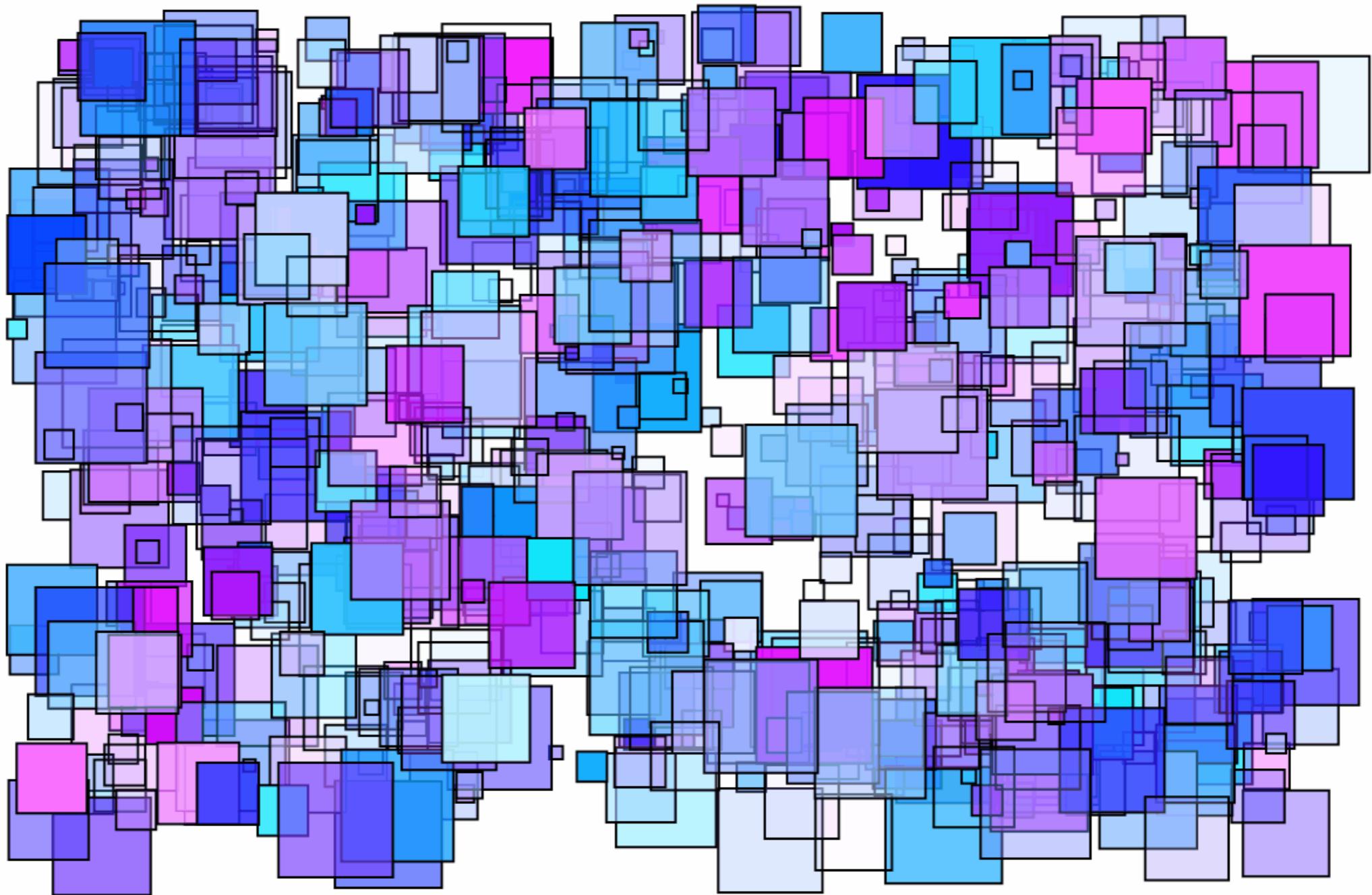
> sketch.js\*

```
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](#)

# QUICKSTART



# QUICKSTART

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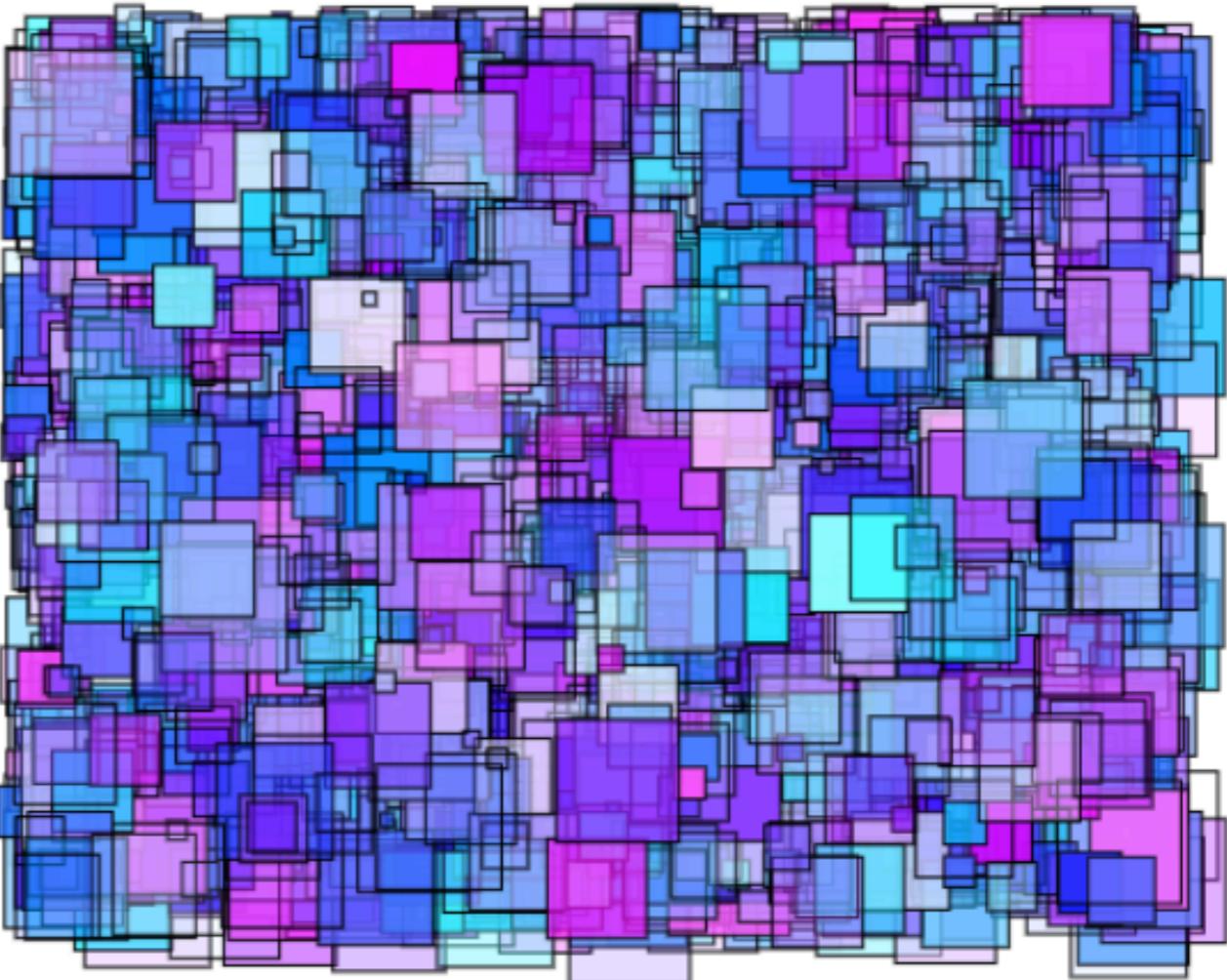
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file: [RandomRects.js](#)

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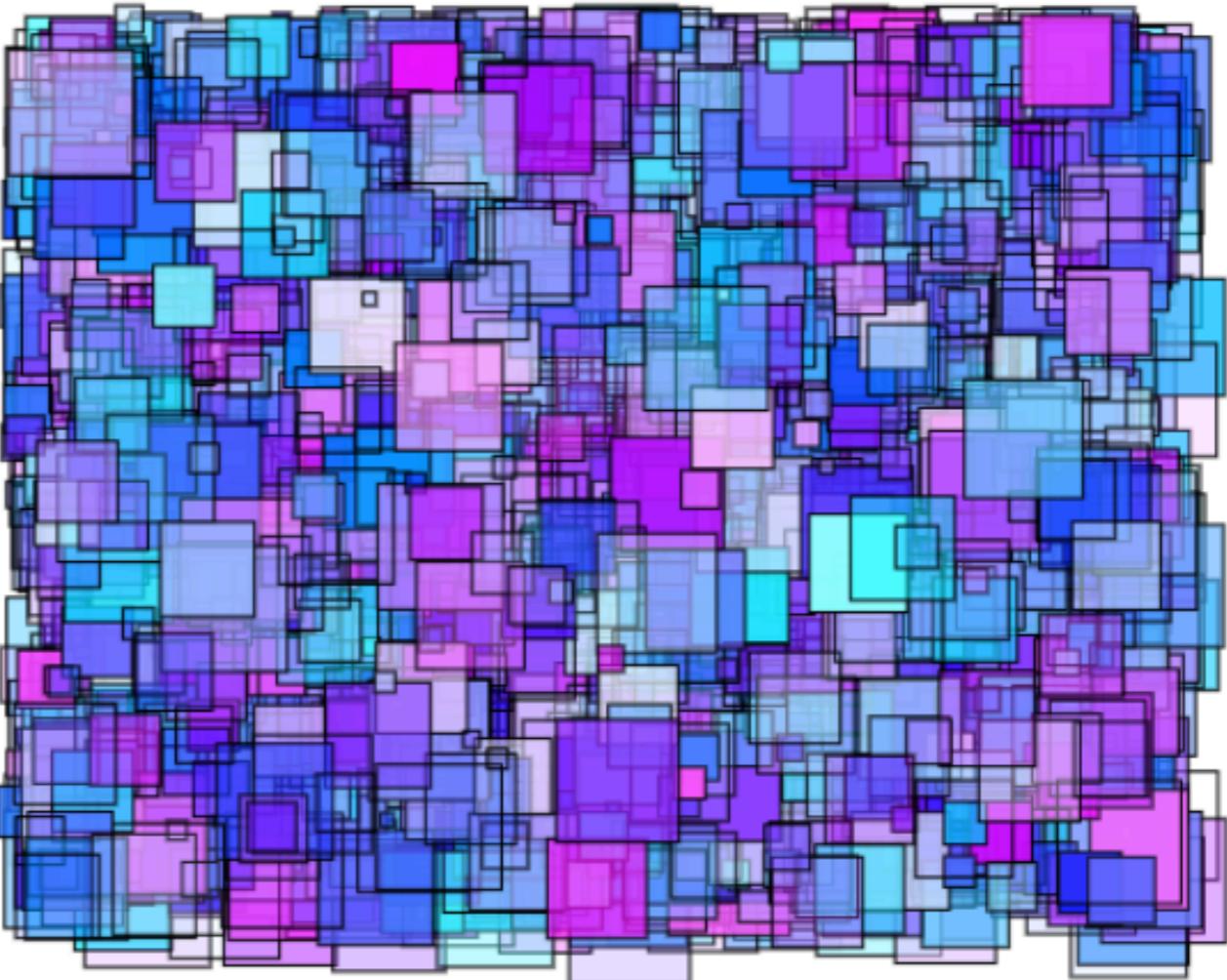
Preview

file: [RandomRects.js](#)

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Preview



file: [RandomRects.js](#)

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```

Preview

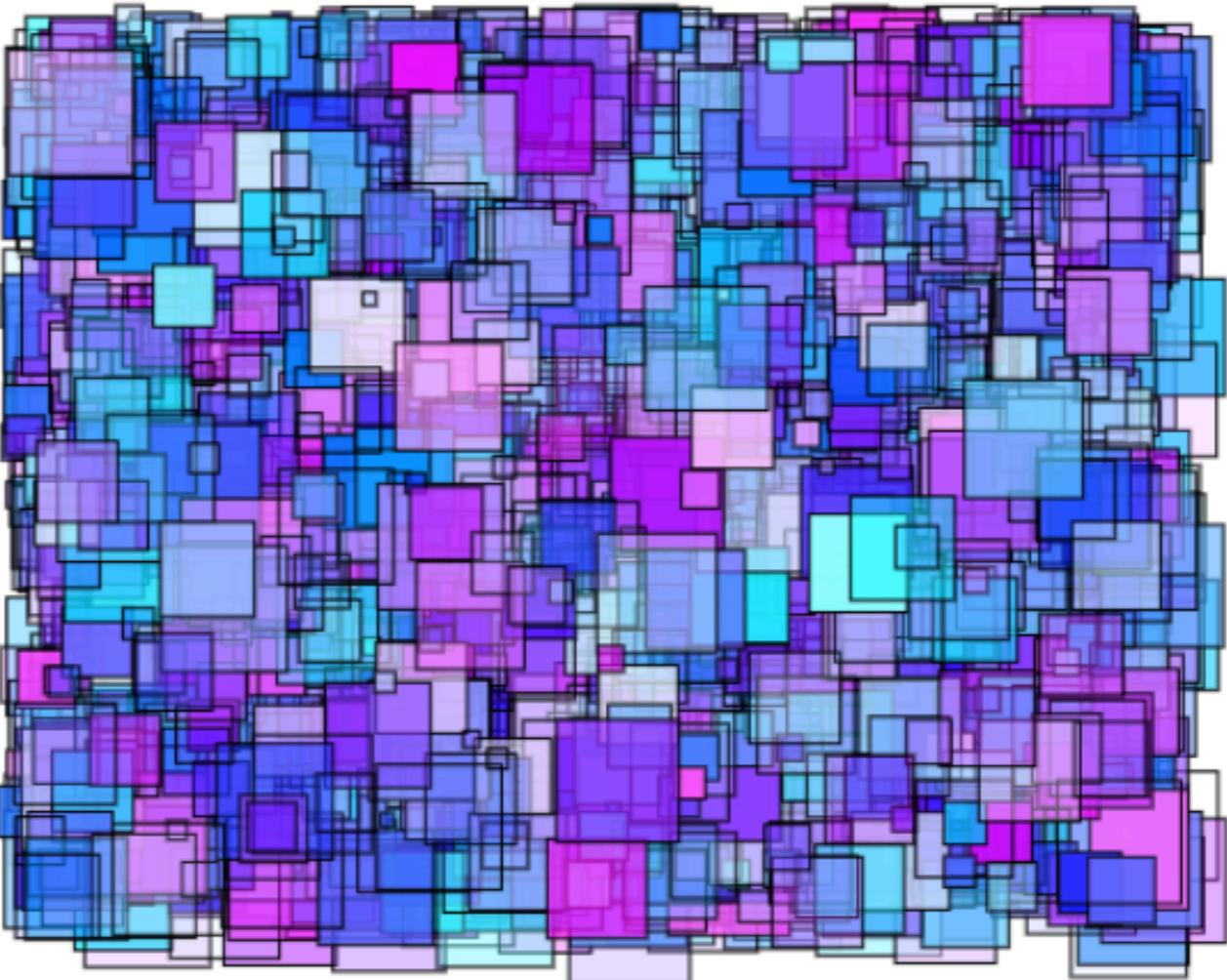
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Preview



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

# 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 1 048 576

- A. HTHHTTTHTTTTHHTHHHTHTHH
- B. TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

BUT WHICH SEQUENCE IS MORE RANDOM?

---



ACCORDING TO PROBABILITY, THE TWO ARE EQUIALLY LIKELY, EACH HAVING A CHANCE OF 1 IN 1 048 576

- A. HTHHTTTHTTTTHHTHHHTHTHH
- B. TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

BUT WHICH SEQUENCE IS MORE RANDOM?

---



ACCORDING TO PROBABILITY, THE TWO ARE EQUIALLY LIKELY, EACH HAVING A CHANCE OF 1 IN 1 048 576

- A. HTHHTTTHTTTTHHTHHHTHTHH
- B. TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

BUT WHICH SEQUENCE IS MORE RANDOM?

---

LET'S DESCRIBE EACH AS CONCISELY AS POSSIBLE

B. TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

→ *write T 20 times*

A. HTHHTTHTTTHTHHHTHTH

???

FOR A, THE BEST WE CAN DO IS TO LIST THE WHOLE SEQUENCE ITSELF...

*HTHHTTHTTTHTHHHTHTH*



# LET'S ADD ONE MORE SEQUENCE...

C. TTFFFTTFFTFFTTFFTTFF

???

B. TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

*write T 20 times*

A. HTHHTTTHTTTHTHHHTHTH

*write HTHHTTTHTTTHTHHHTHTH*



LESS  
RANDOM  
(SHORTER)



B. TTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTT

*write T 20 times*

C. TTFFTFFTTFFTTFF

*write TTFF 5 times*

A. HTHTTHTHTHHTHHHTH

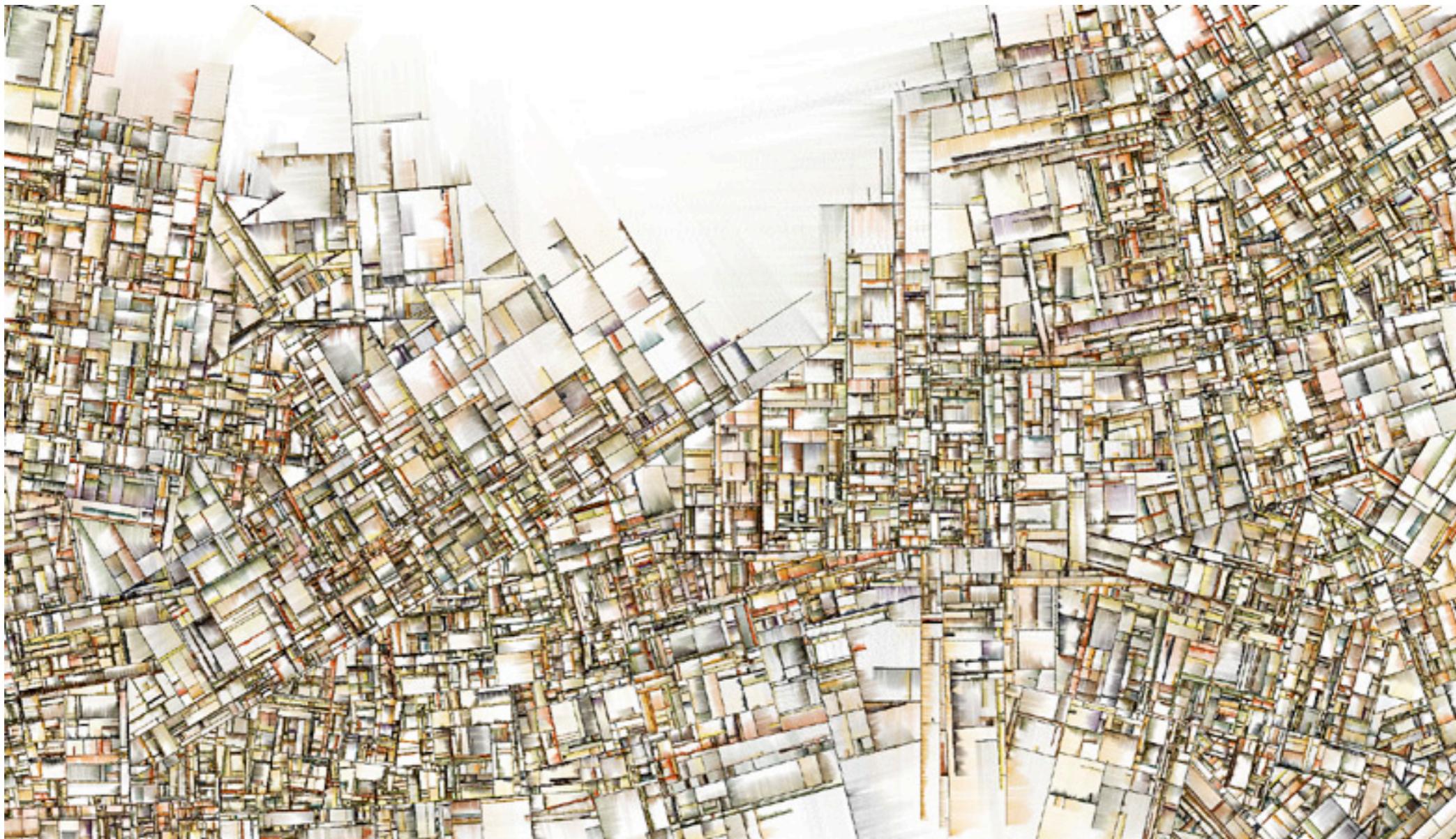
*write HTHTHTTHTHTHHTHHHTH*

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

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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

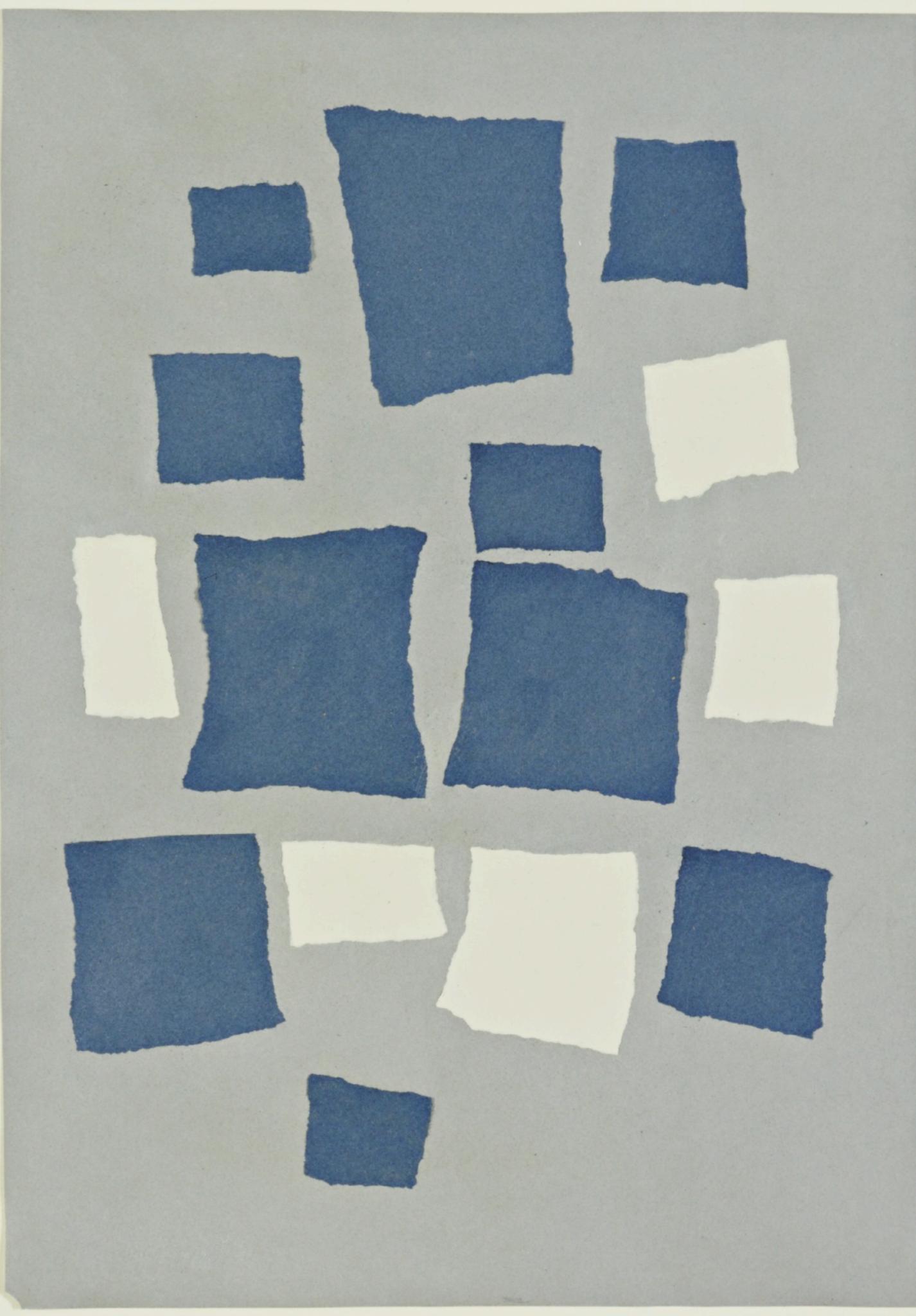


“

*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...

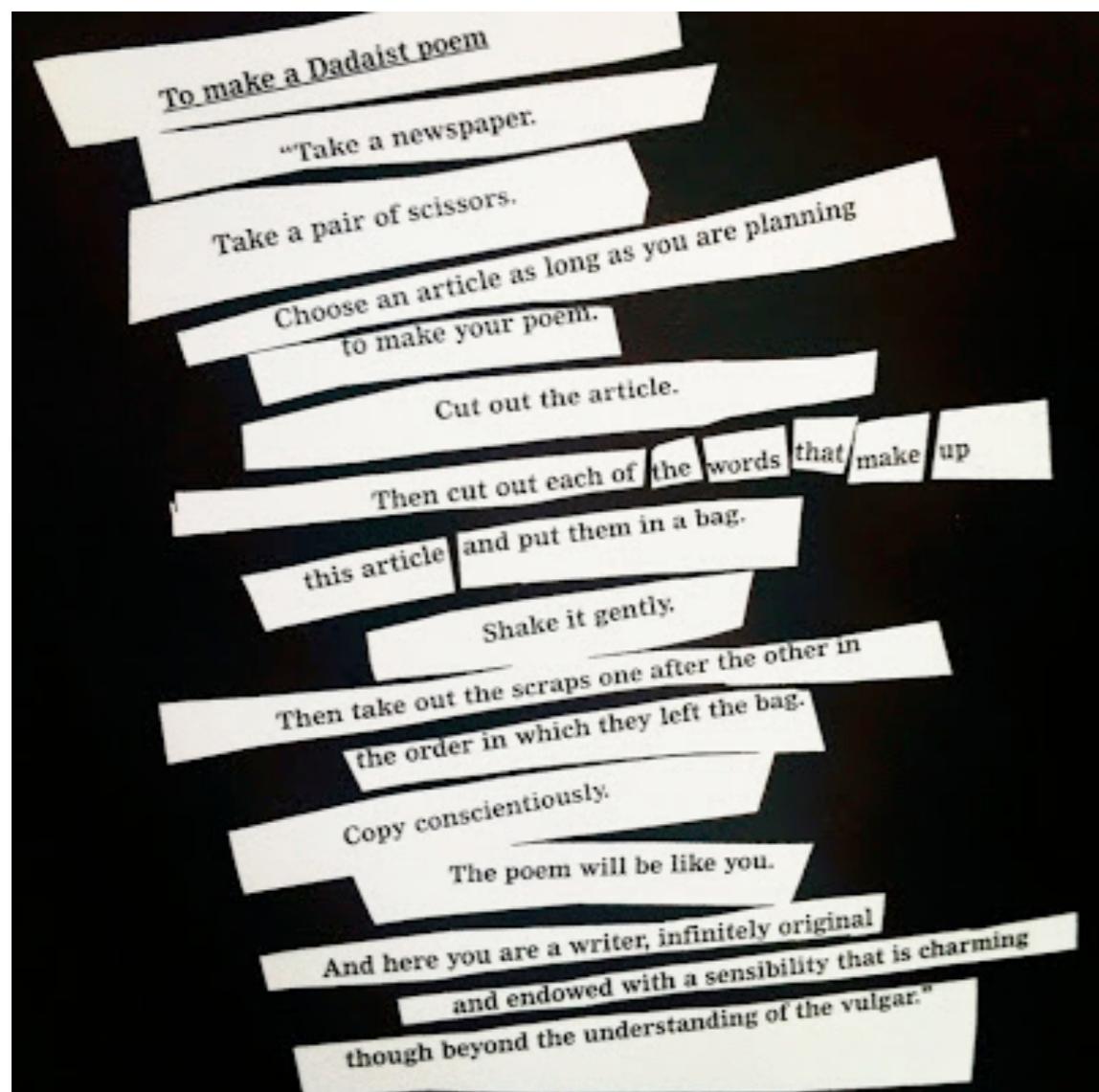


**Jean (Hans) Arp**

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

*eye droop once more*



**TRISTAN TZARA**

# VERA MOLNAR

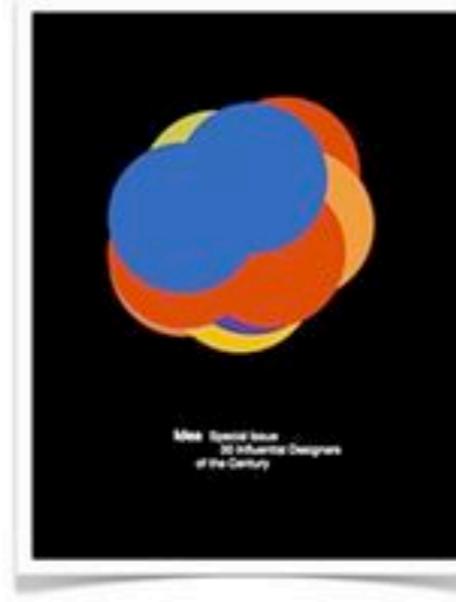
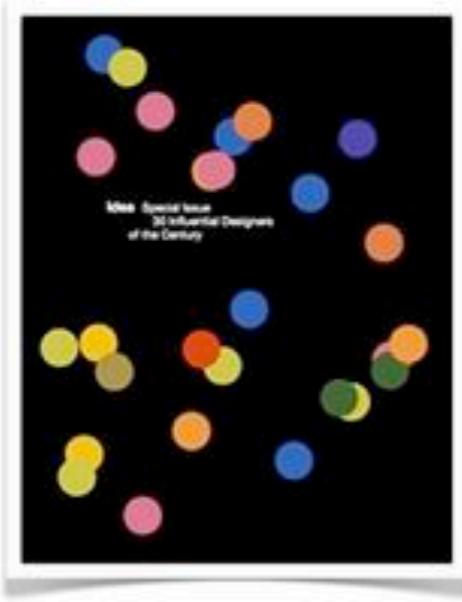
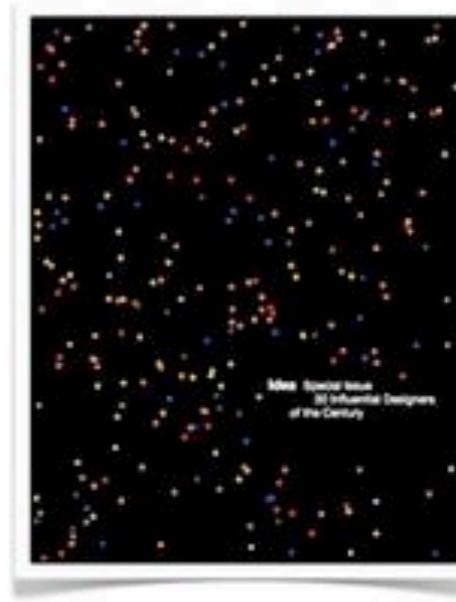
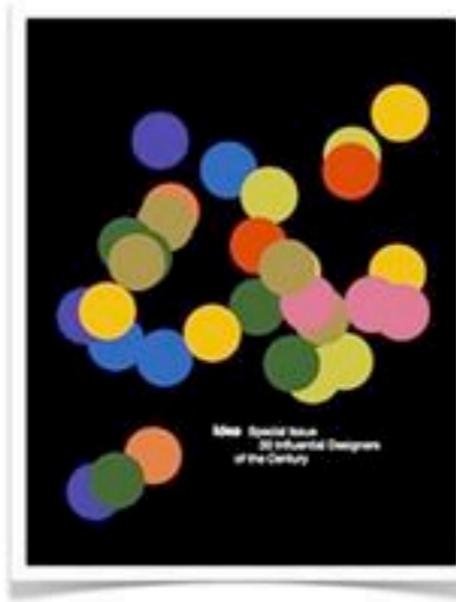
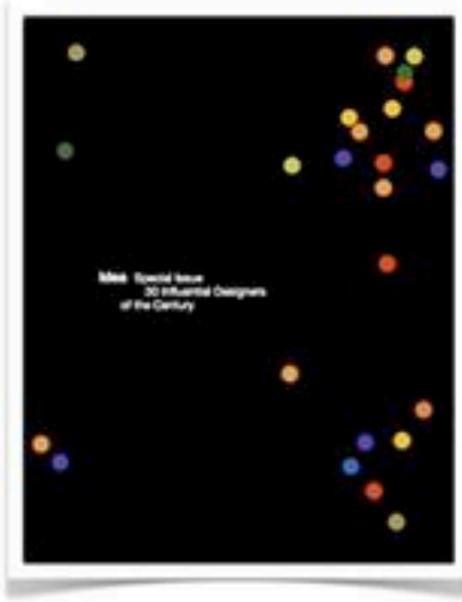
“*The machine, thought to be cold and inhuman, can help to realize what is most subjective, unattainable, and profound in a human being.*

-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...

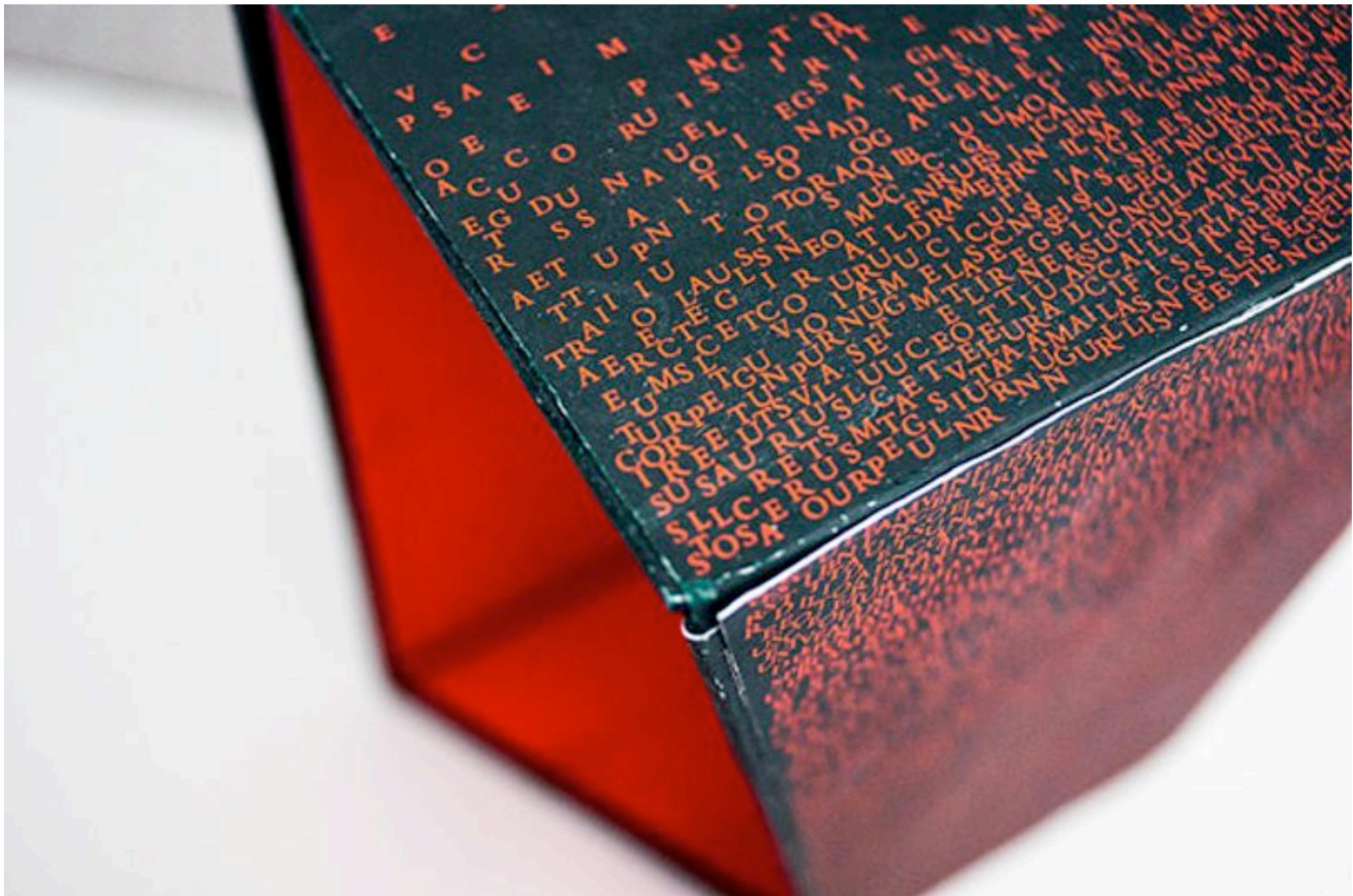


# RANDOMNESS IN DESIGN



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.

# TIM KNOWLES



Tim Knowles, Oak/Larch On Easel (2005)

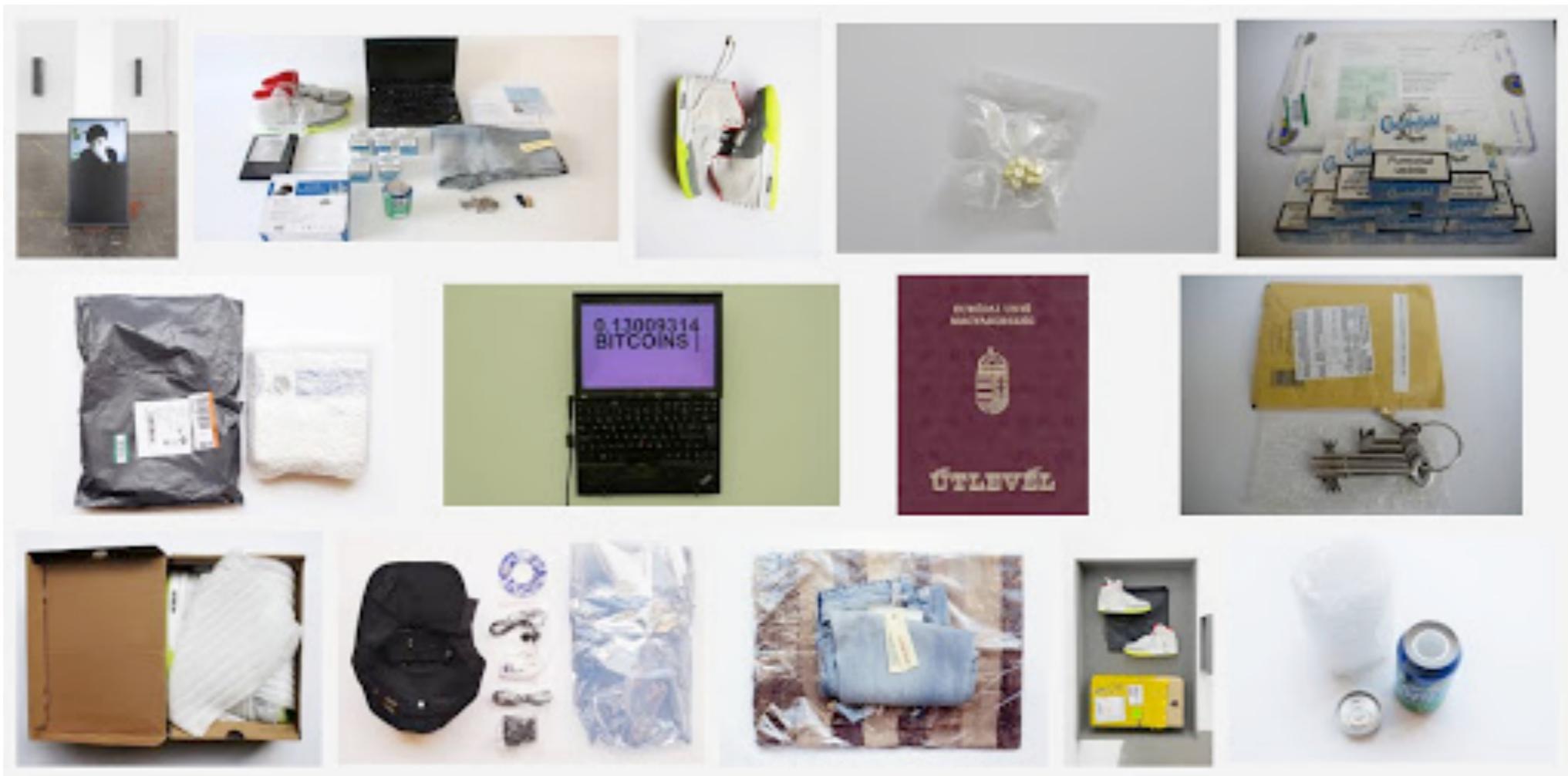
# CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN

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 ?

- to diminish authorial control
- to add variation to predictable outputs
- to create surprise (for author or audience)
- to explore a possibility space (see Molnár)
- to highlight *process* over *product*
- for conceptual or critical strategies

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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

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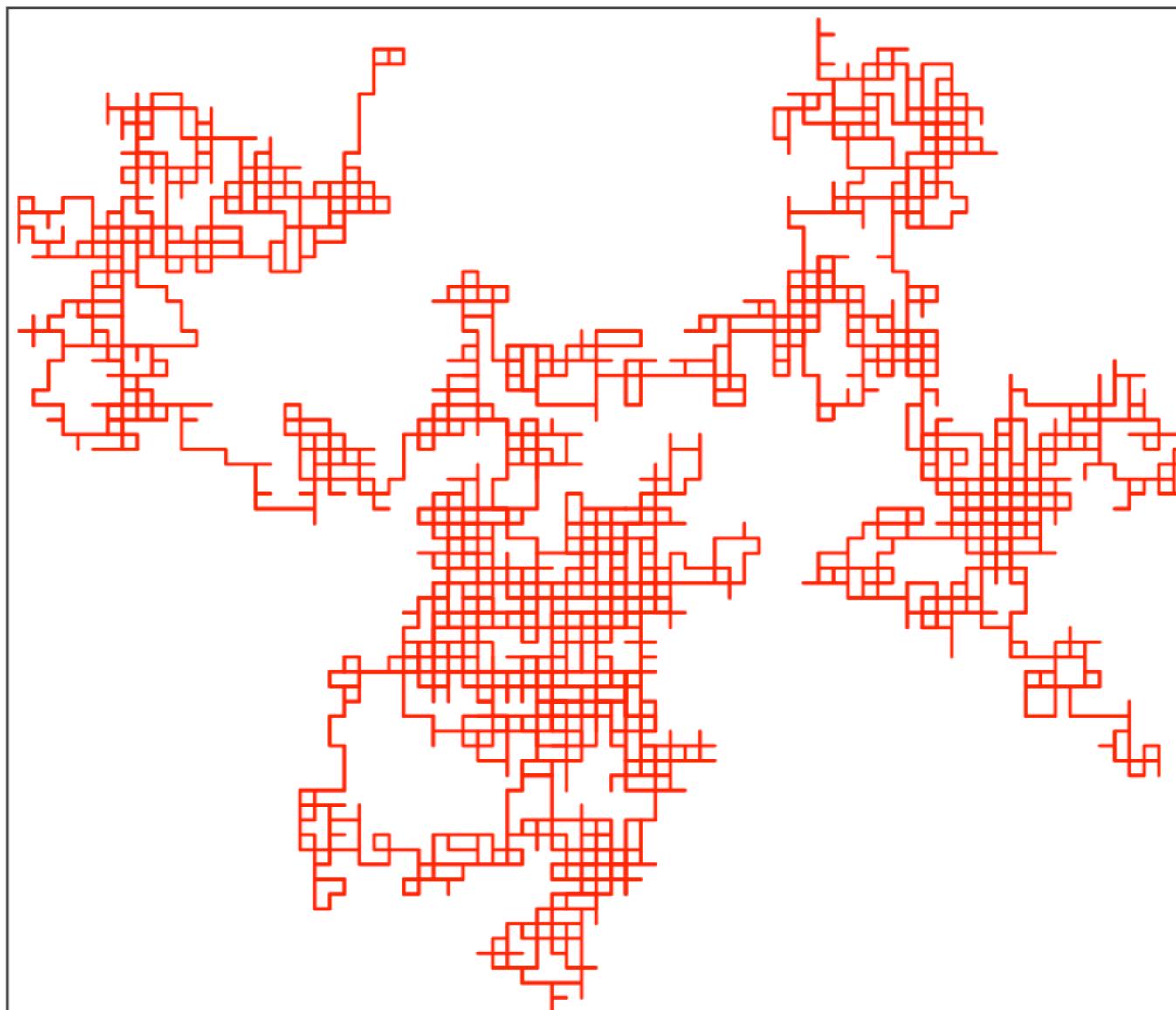
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```

Preview



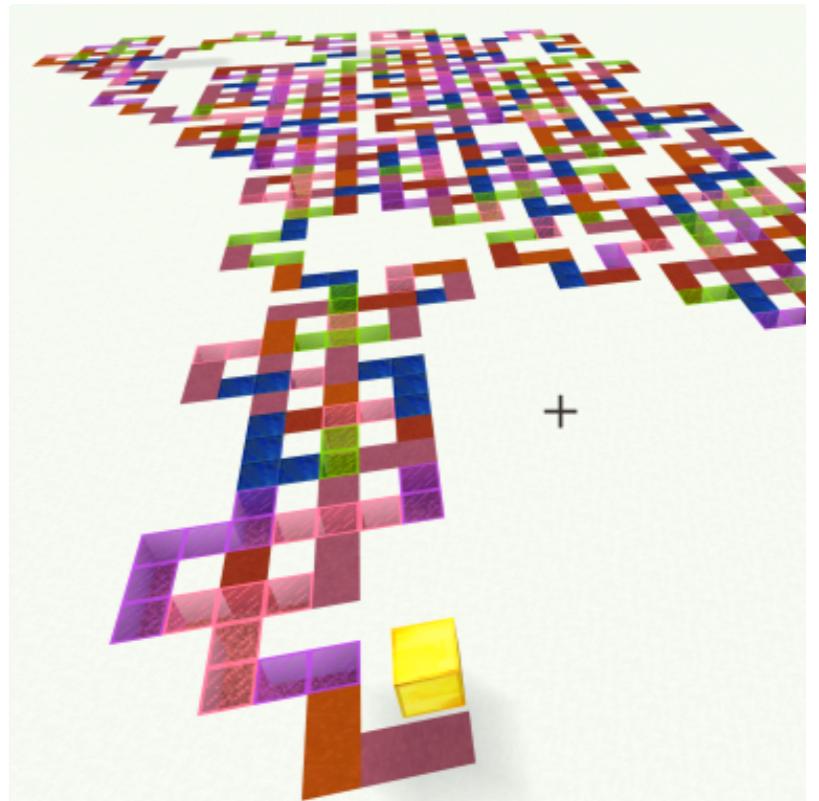
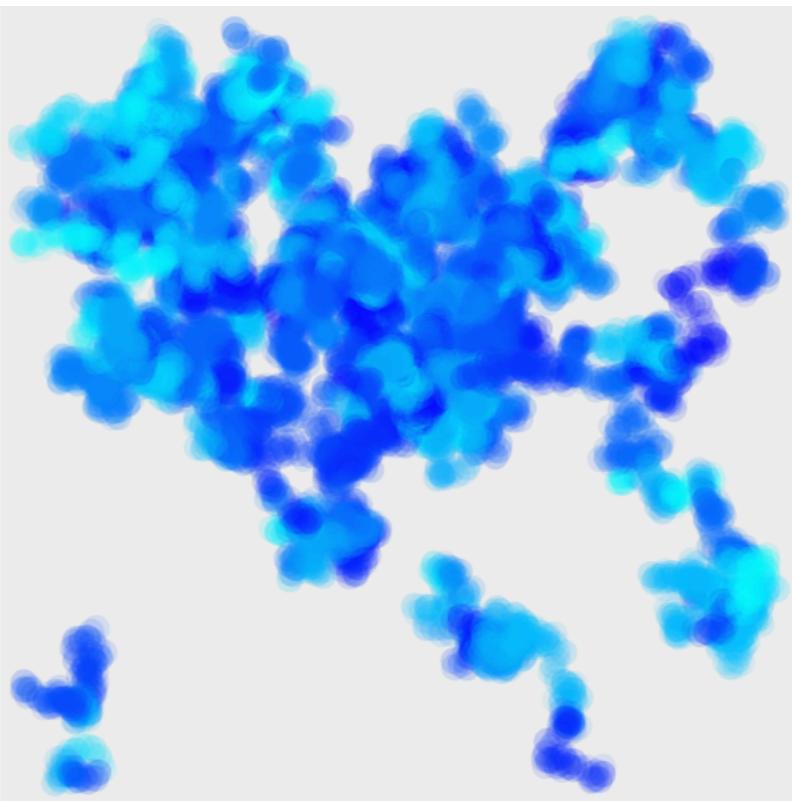
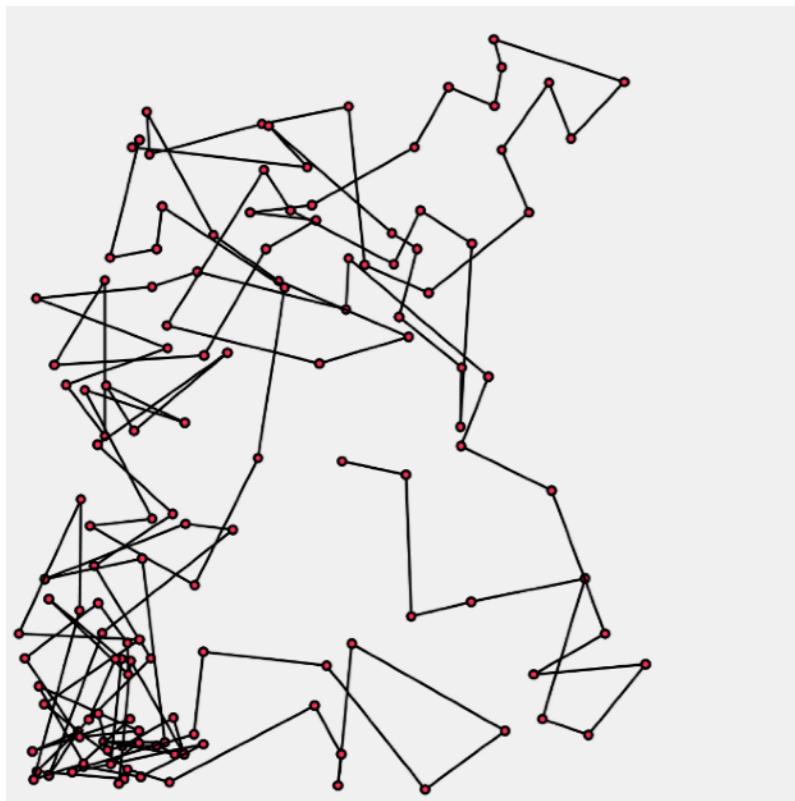
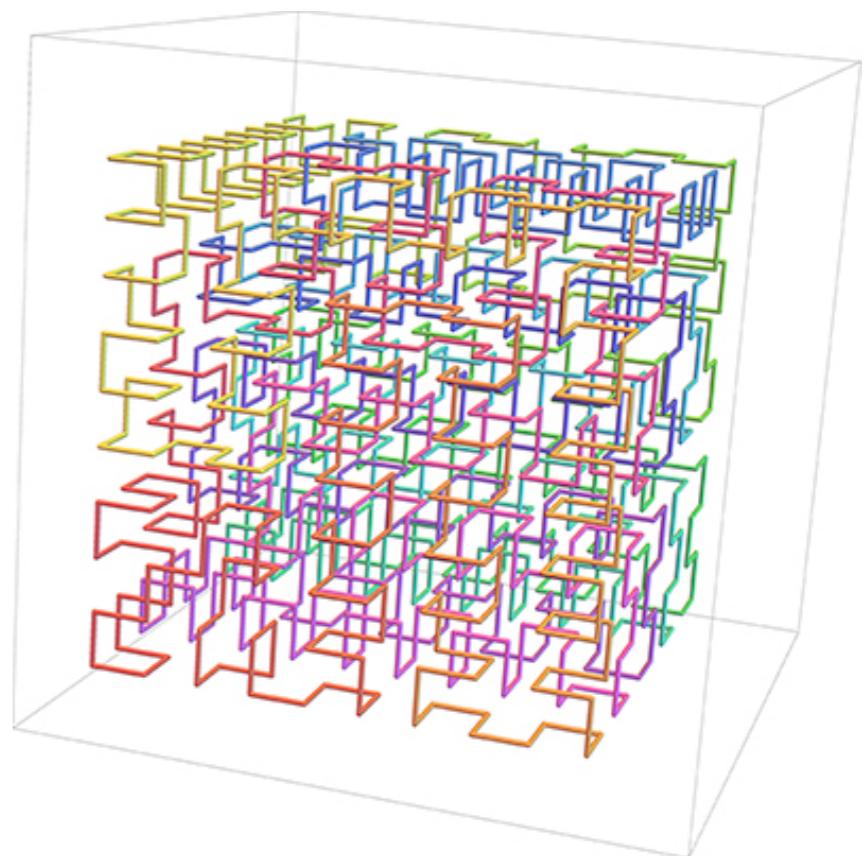
One of the most common techniques using randomness is the *random walk*, which shows up in a ranges of real-world contexts, from the movement of financial asset prices, to the paths of particles in quantum physics...

# RANDOM WALK



a random walk over several hundred steps...

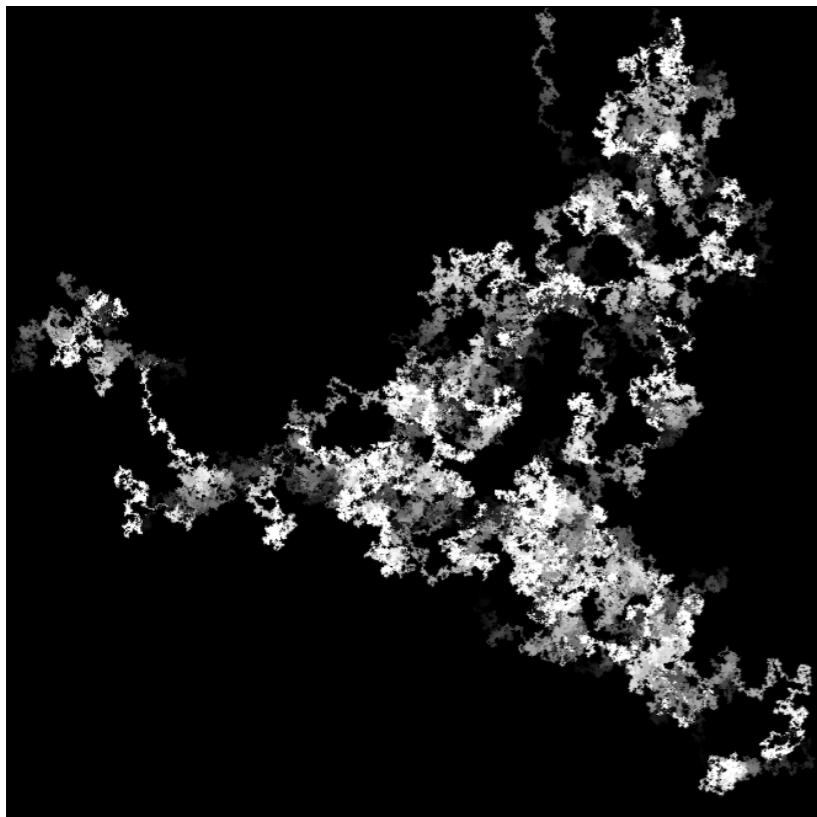
# RANDOM WALK



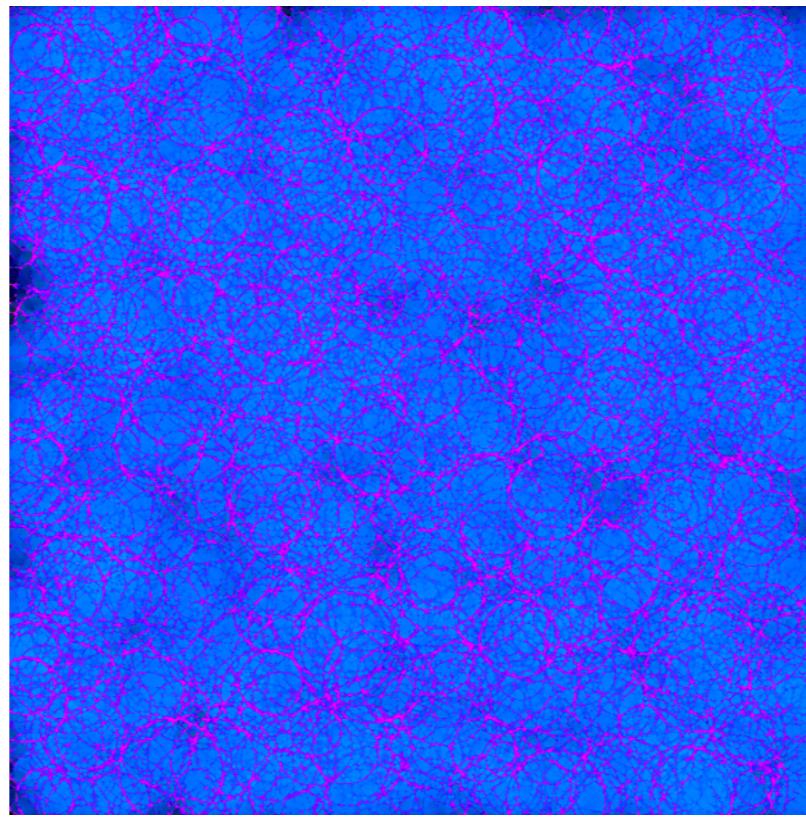
*visualising random walk variations*

Image credit: Lali Barrière

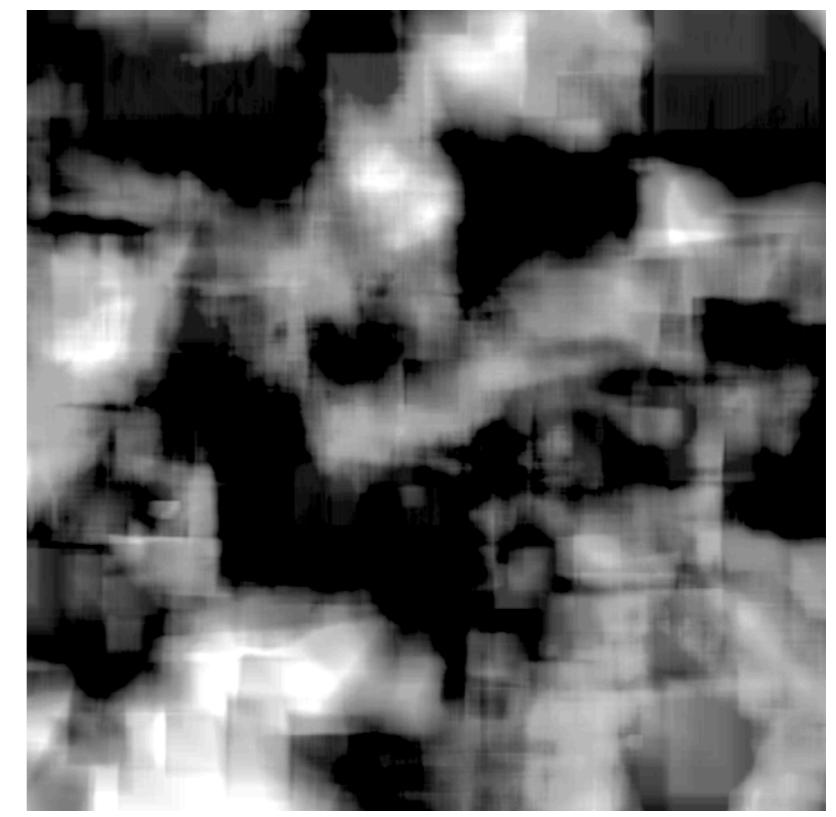
# MULTIPLE RANDOM WALKERS



as lines



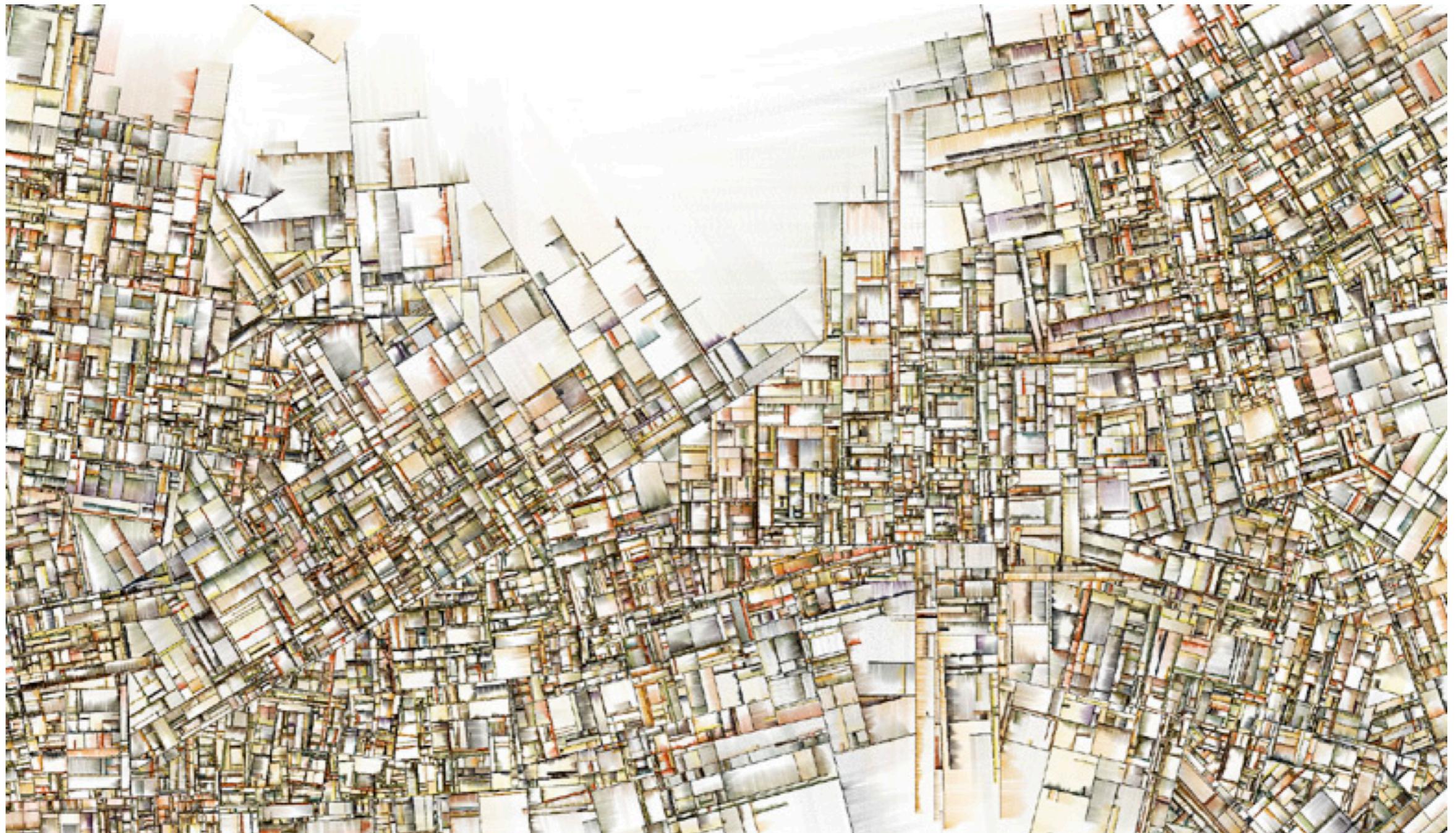
as circles



as rectangles

*random walkers interacting*

# RANDOM WALK VARIATIONS



Jared Tarbell, Substrate, 2003

# RECODING

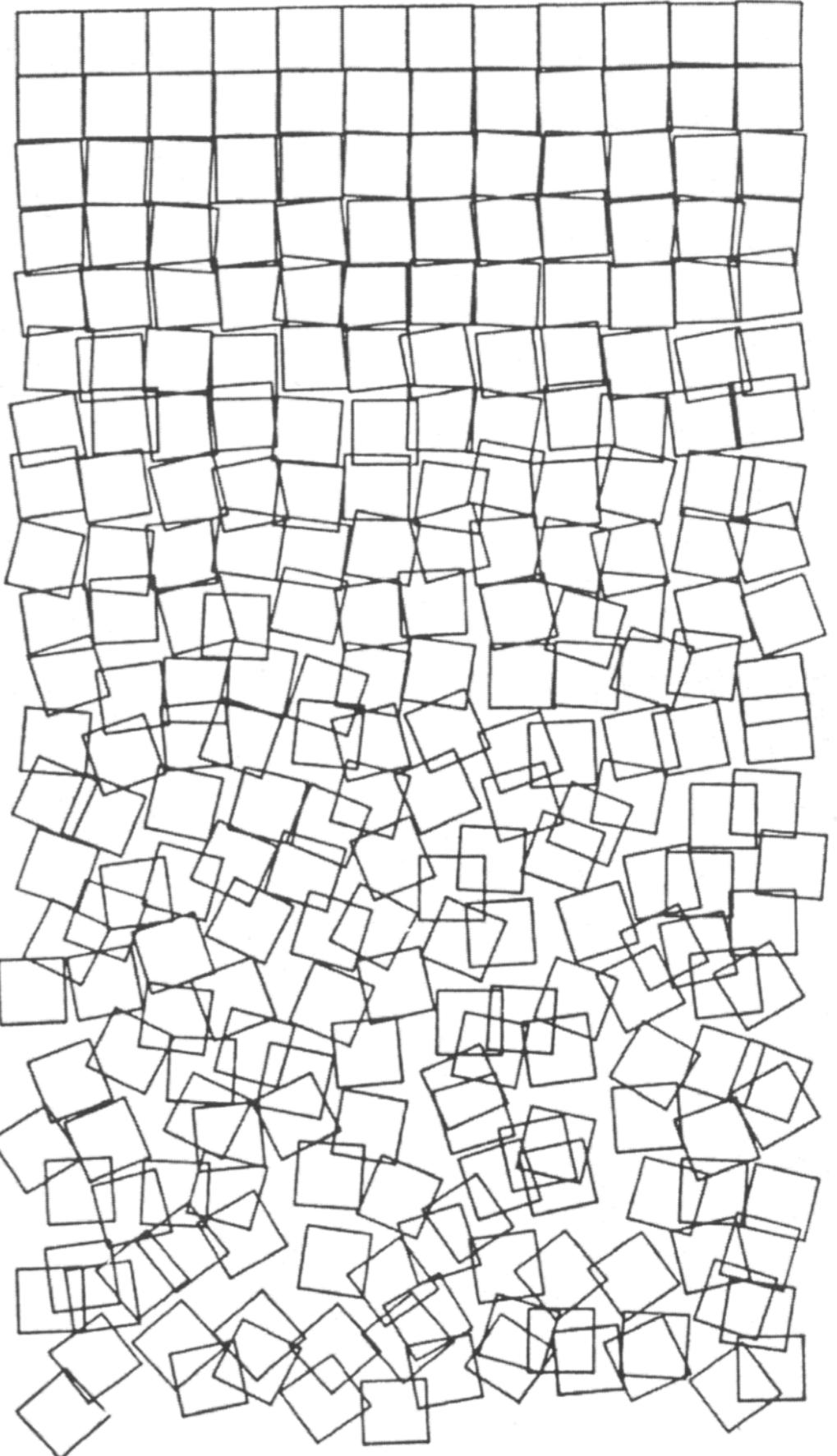
COPYING DIRECTLY FROM WORKS OF ART GIVES THE ARTIST INSIGHT INTO THE CREATIVE PROCESS: INSIGHTS WHICH CANNOT BE LEARNED FROM ANY OTHER SOURCE.

---

- GERALD KING

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

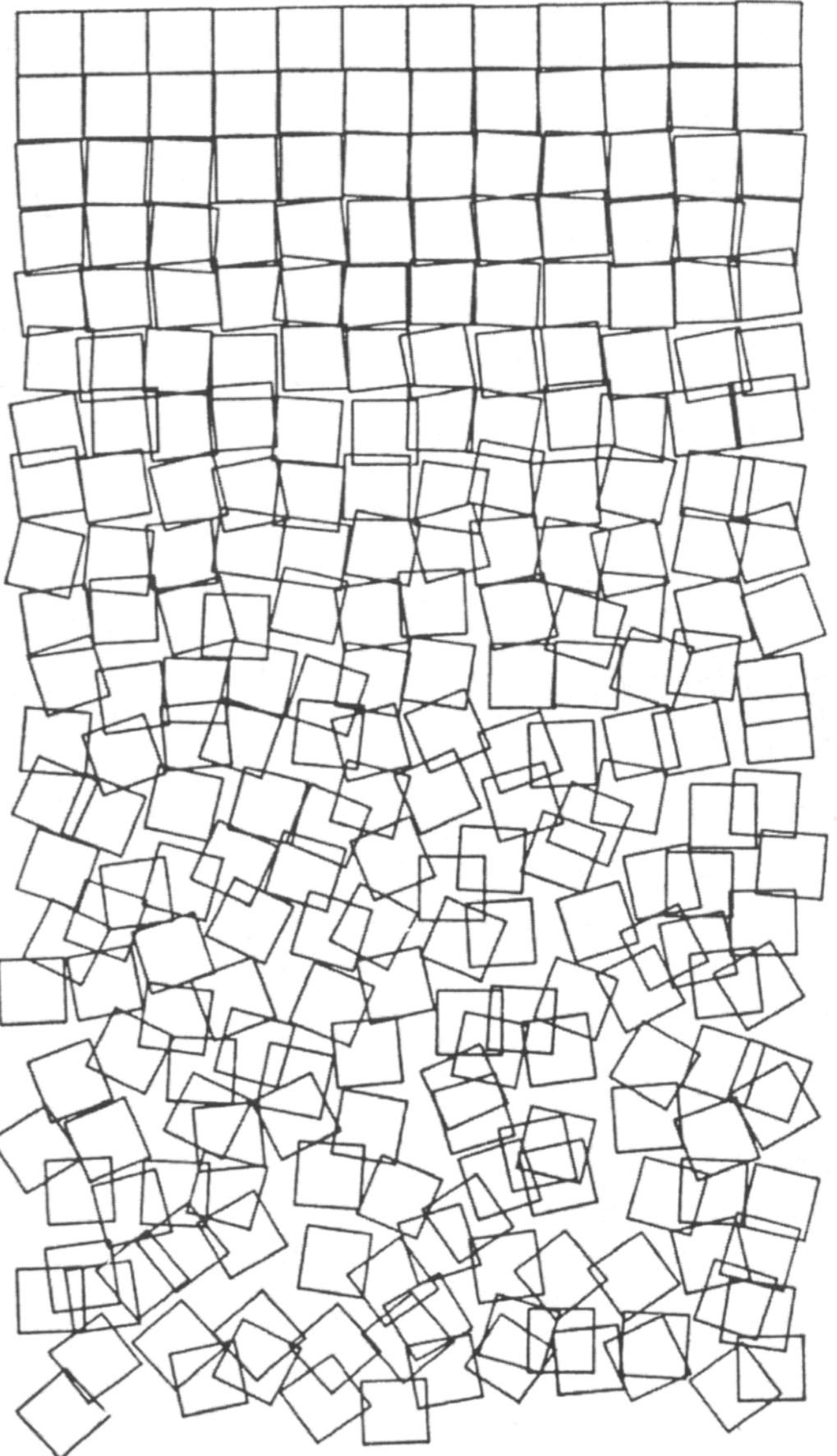
**?**



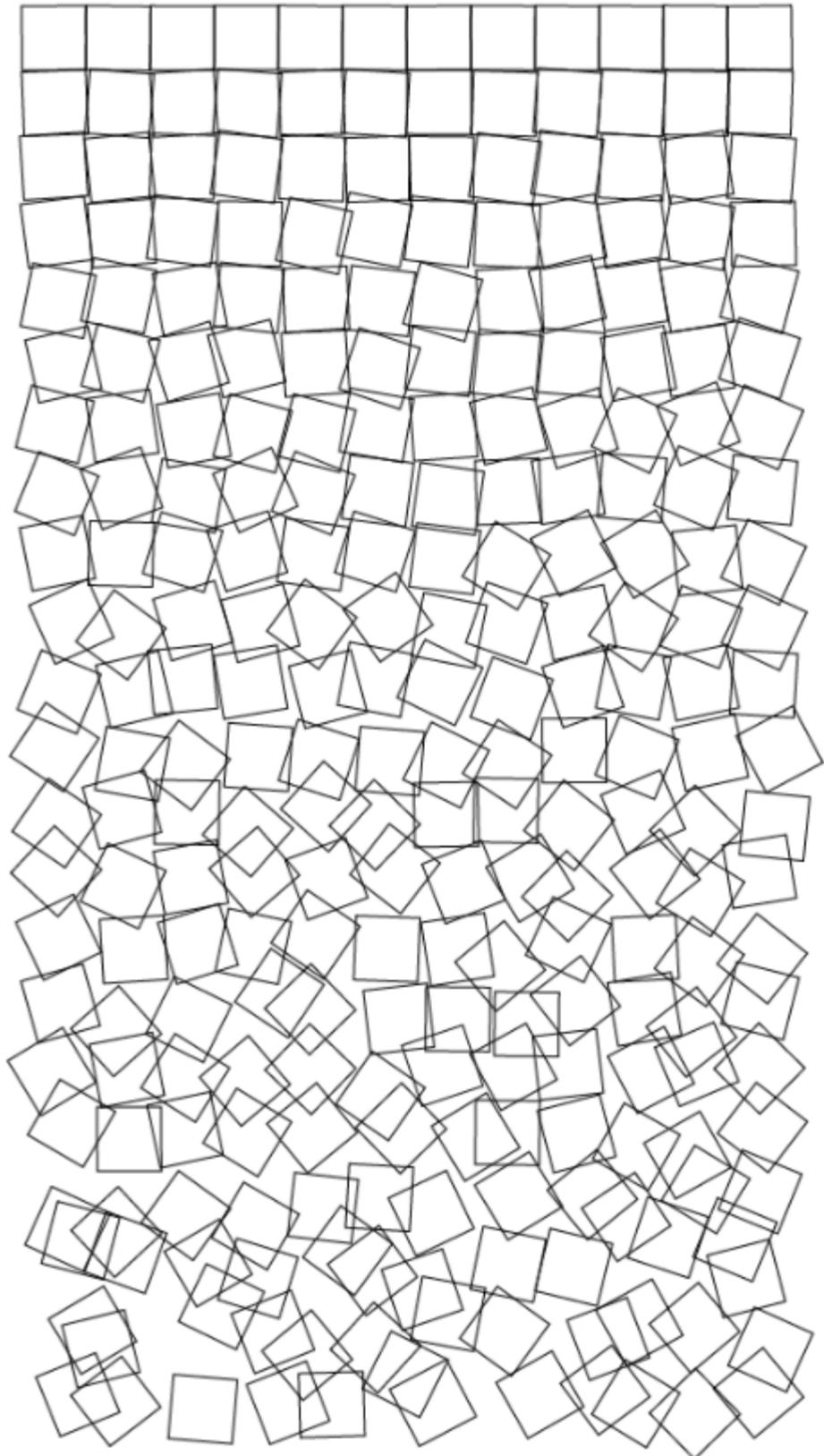
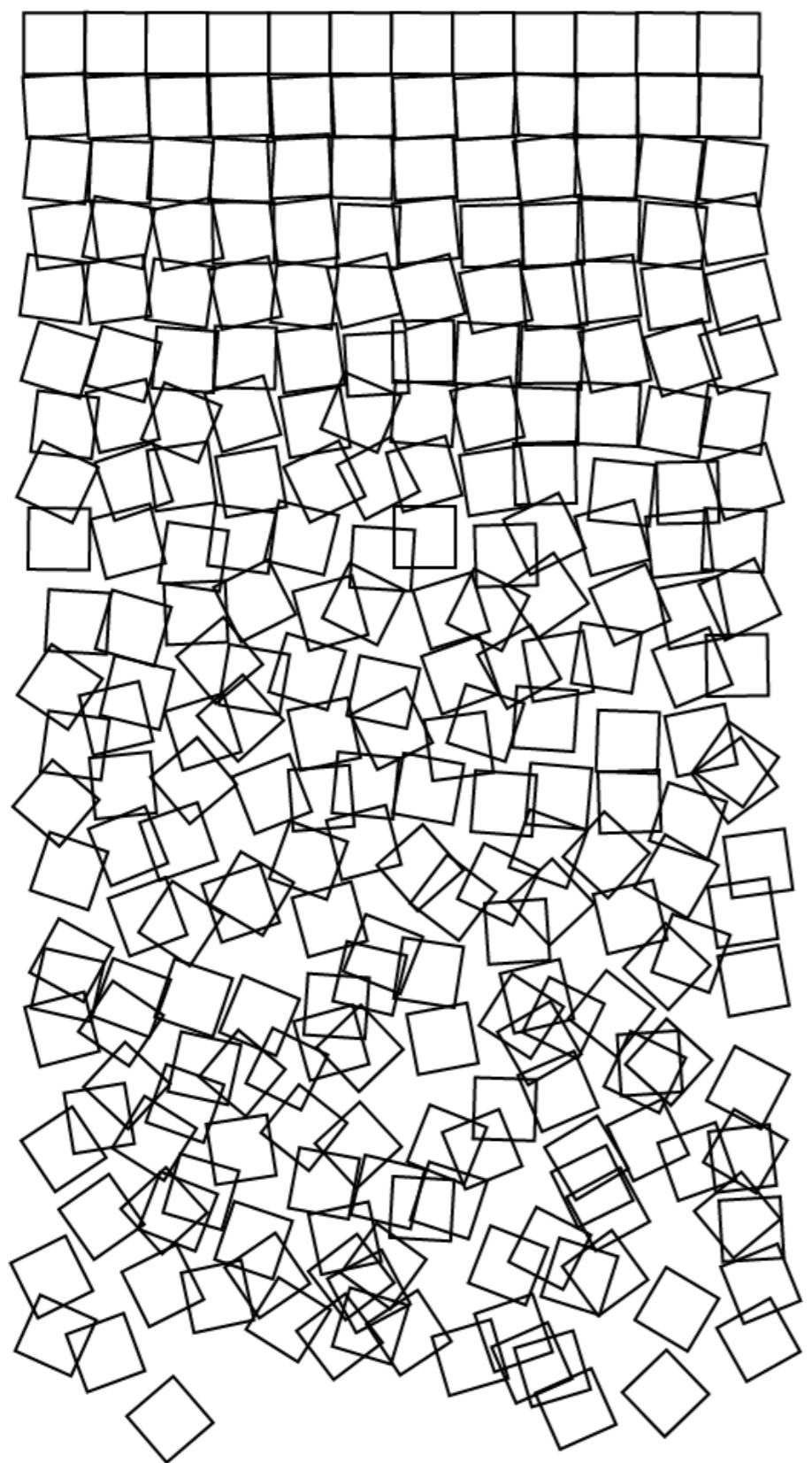
*Schotter (Gravel)* - Georg Nees, 1968

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

**?**



*Schotter (Gravel)* - Georg Nees, 1968



*Schotter (Gravel)* by Georg Nees, 2021

```
let sqSize = 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++) {

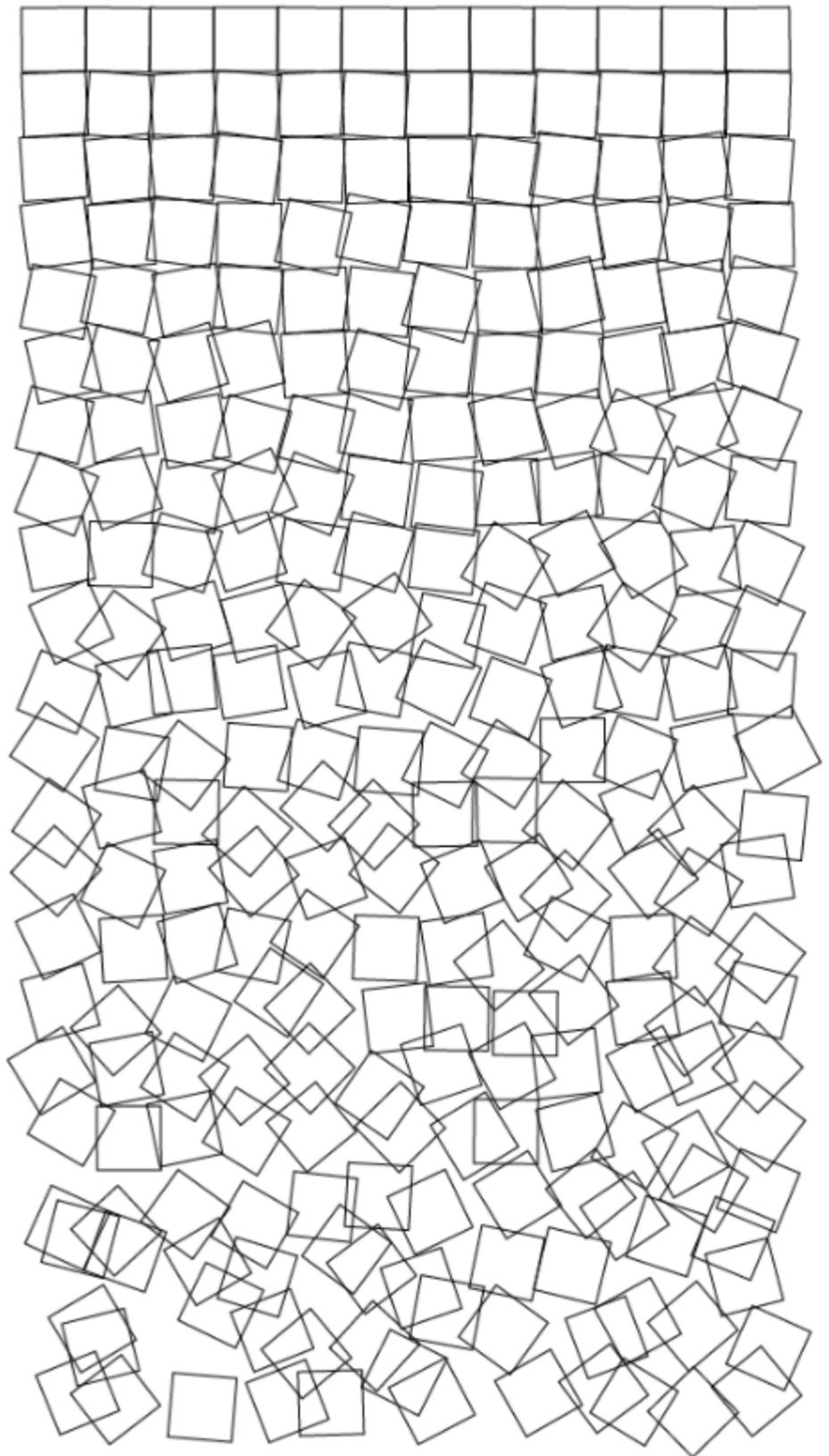
      let displacement = max(j, 0.2);
      let randRotation = random(-4, 4) * displacement;
      let randOffset = random(0, 1) * displacement;

      translate(i * sqSize, j * sqSize);
      rotate(radians(randRotation));

      square(-sqSize/2 + randOffset, -sqSize/2 + randOffset, sqSize);

      rotate(radians(-randRotation));
      translate(-i * sqSize, -j * sqSize);
    }
  }
}
```

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



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

```
let sqSize = 20;

function setup() {
  createCanvas(400, 600);

  noFill();
  background(255);
  translate(width/5, height/8);

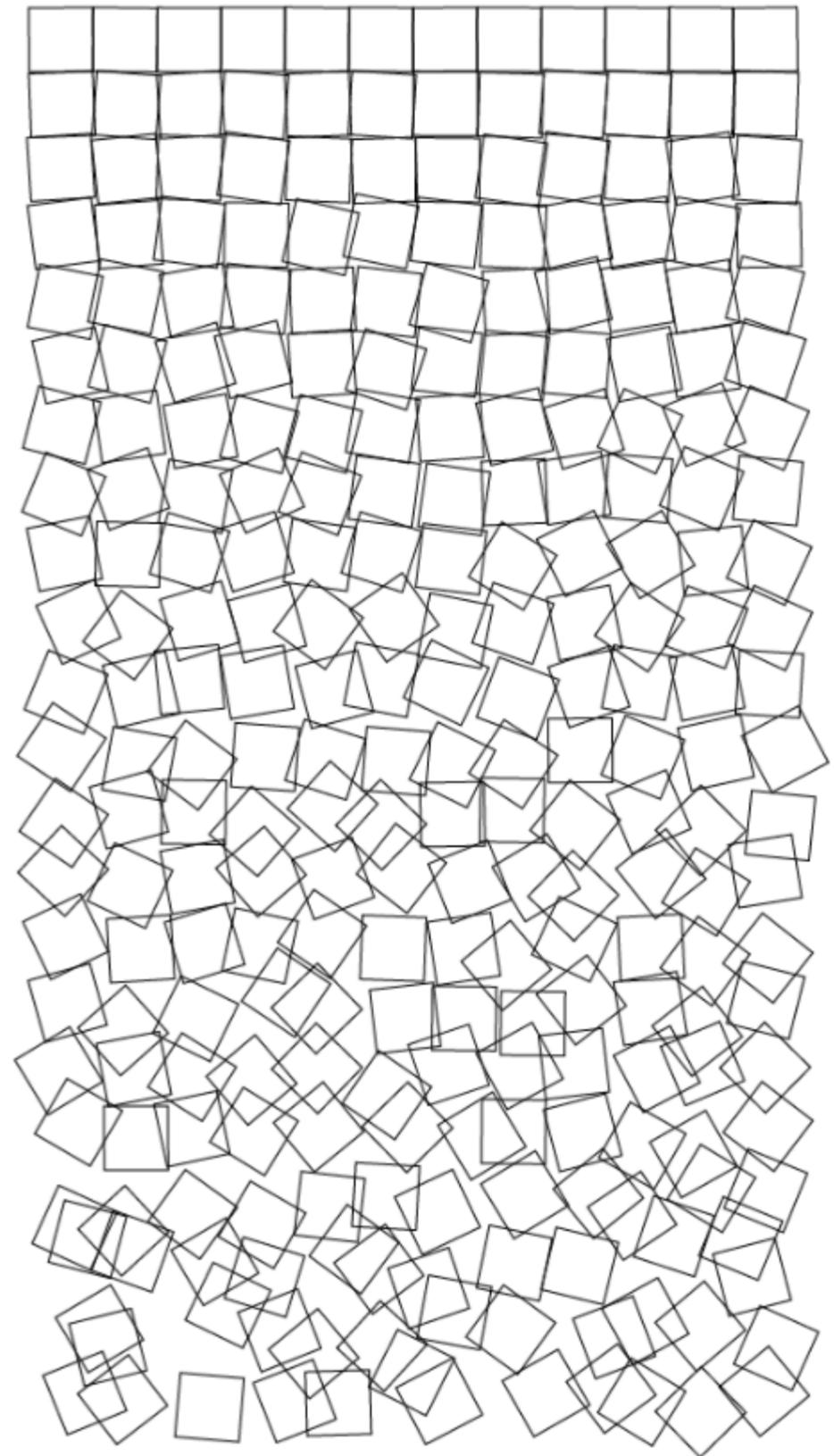
  for (let i = 0; i < 12; i++) {
    for (let j = 0; j < 22; j++) {
      let displacement = max(j, 0.2);
      let randRotation = random(-4, 4) * displacement;
      let randOffset = random(0, 1) * displacement;

      translate(i * sqSize, j * sqSize);
      rotate(radians(randRotation));

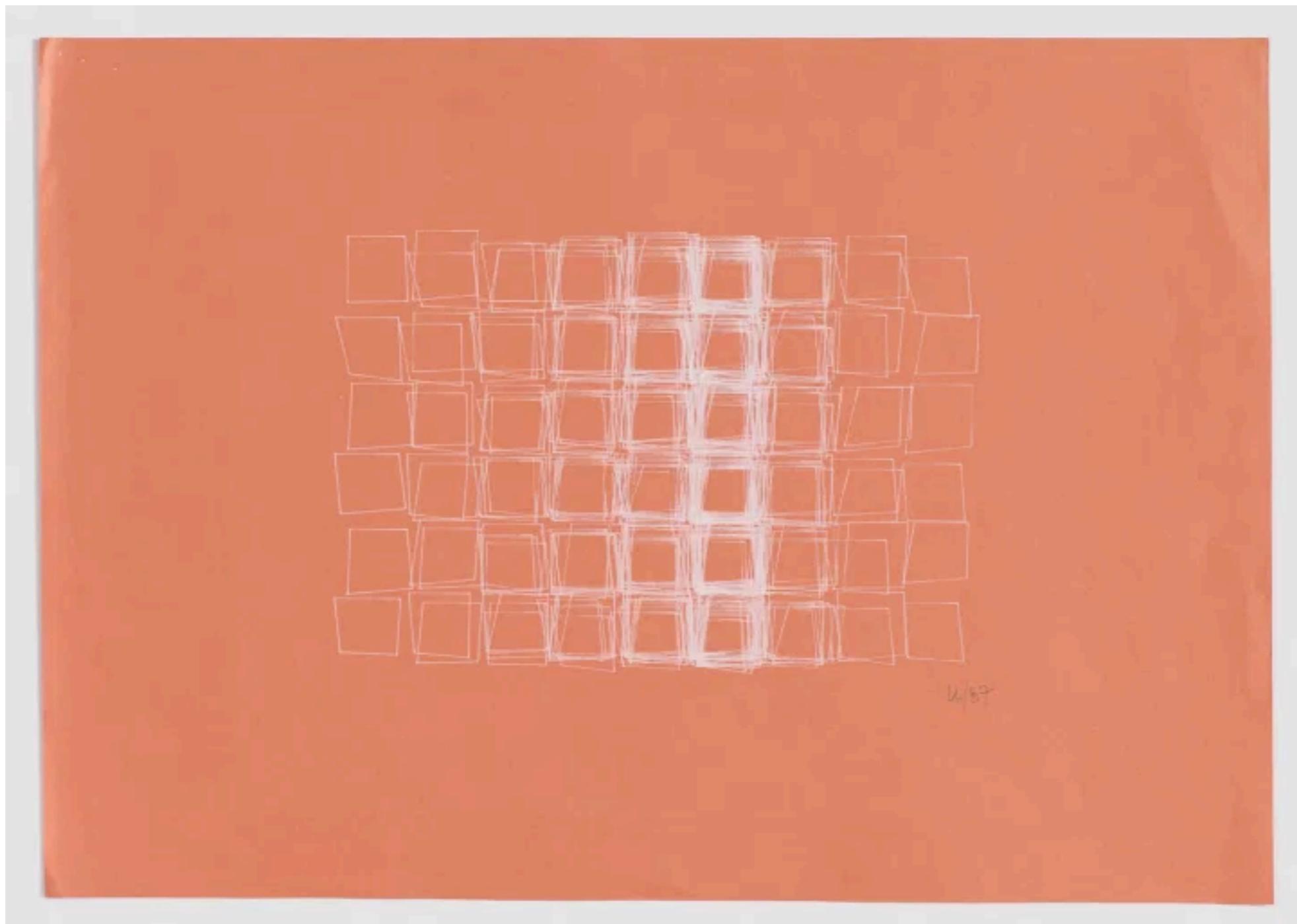
      square(-sqSize/2 + randOffset, -sqSize/2 + randOffset, sqSize);

      rotate(radians(-randRotation));
      translate(-i * sqSize, -j * sqSize);
    }
  }
}
```

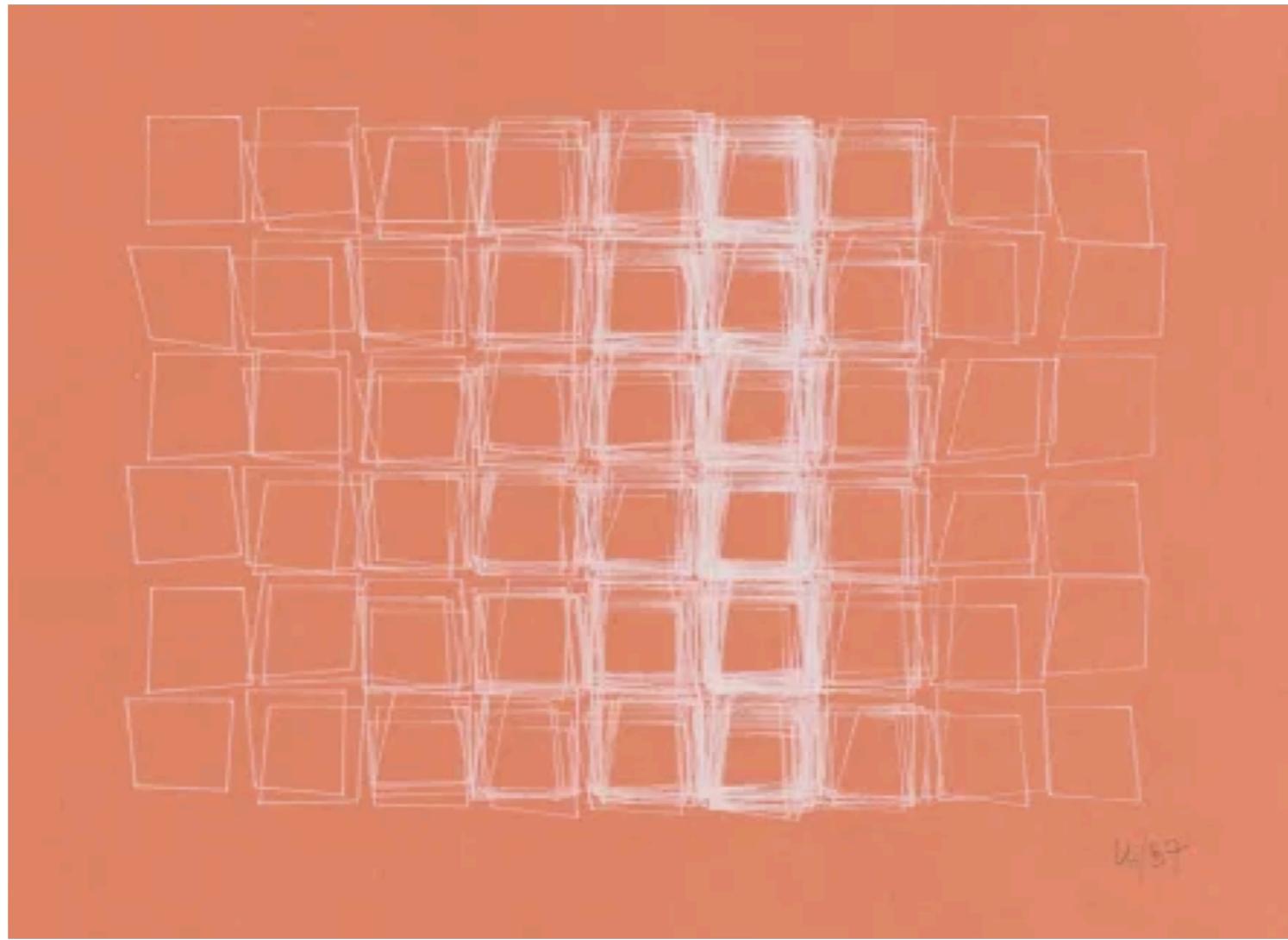
file: [Recode-Schotter.js](#)



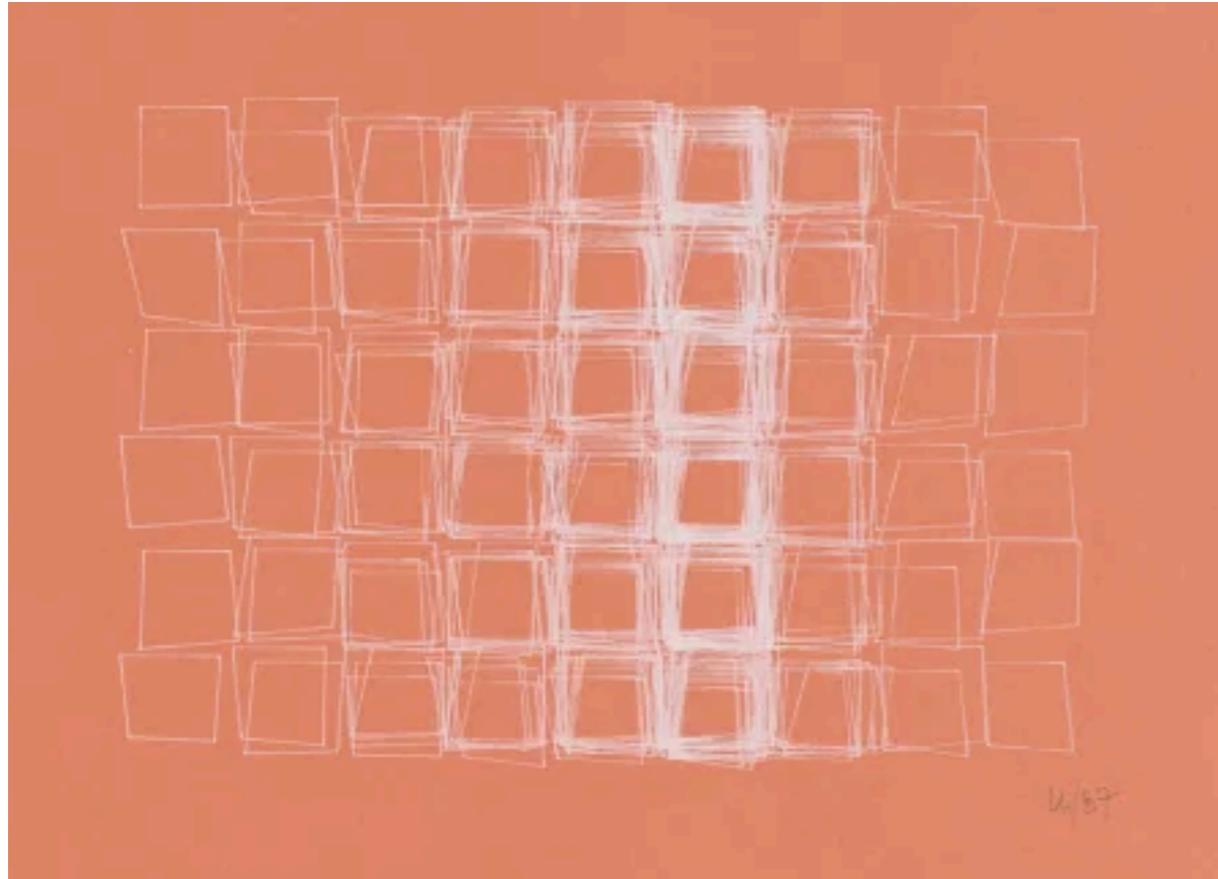
Recode of Schotter (*Gravel*) by Georg Nees, 2021



VERA MOLNAR “STRUCTURE DE QUADRILATERES” (1987)

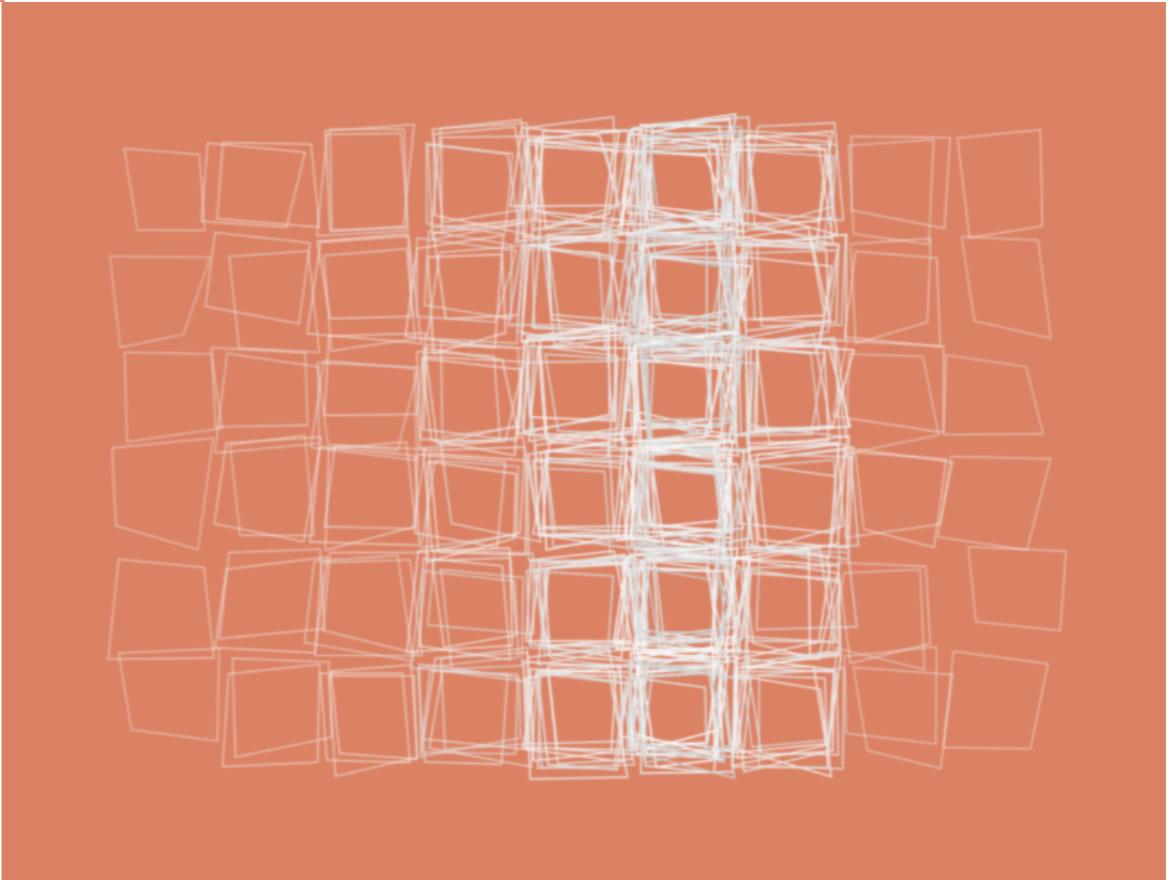


- white lines on a salmon-colored background
- another grid, this time with 9 columns and 6 rows
- moving from left to right, the number of quads in each column increases, reaching a max in the 6th column, and then decreasing again...
- each of the 4 points in the square is randomly offset from its position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

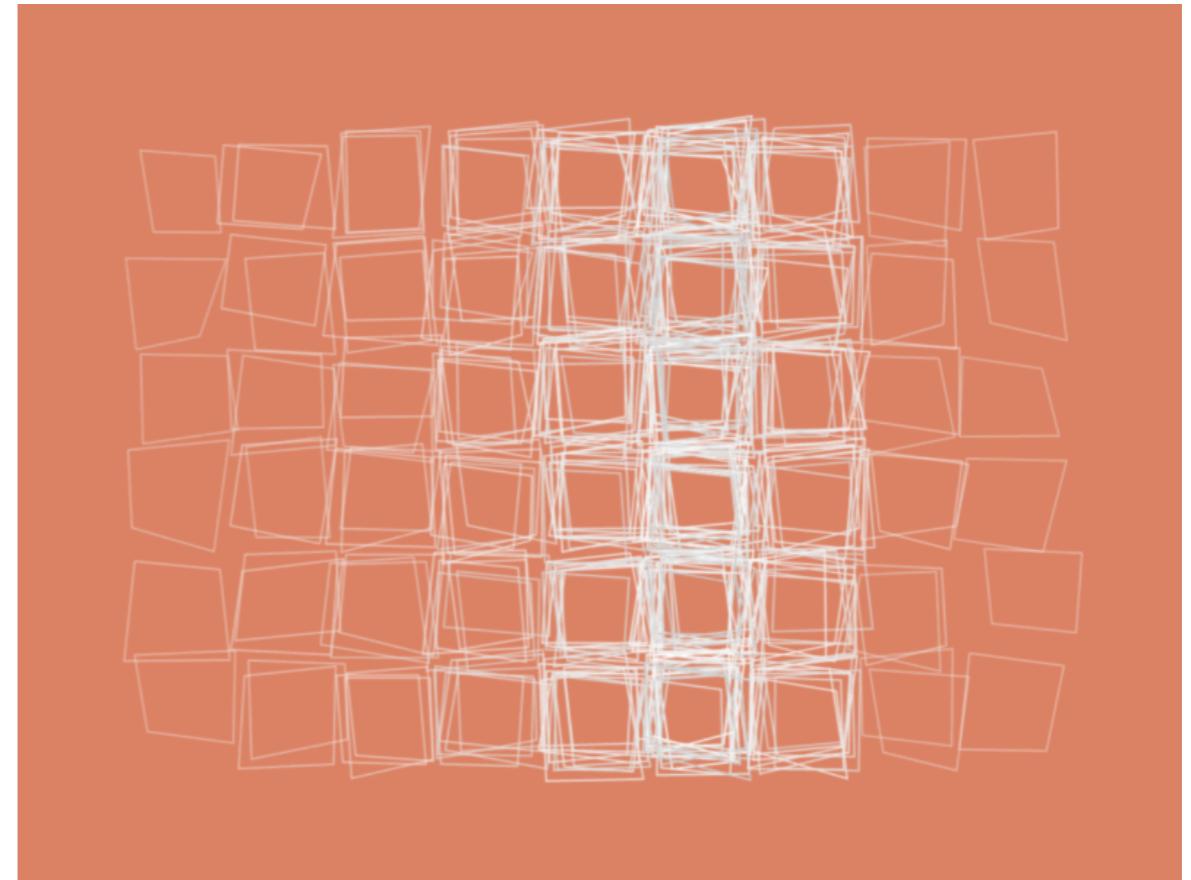
        let x3 = x1 + sz + random(-k, k);
        let y3 = y1 + sz + random(-k, k);

        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](#)



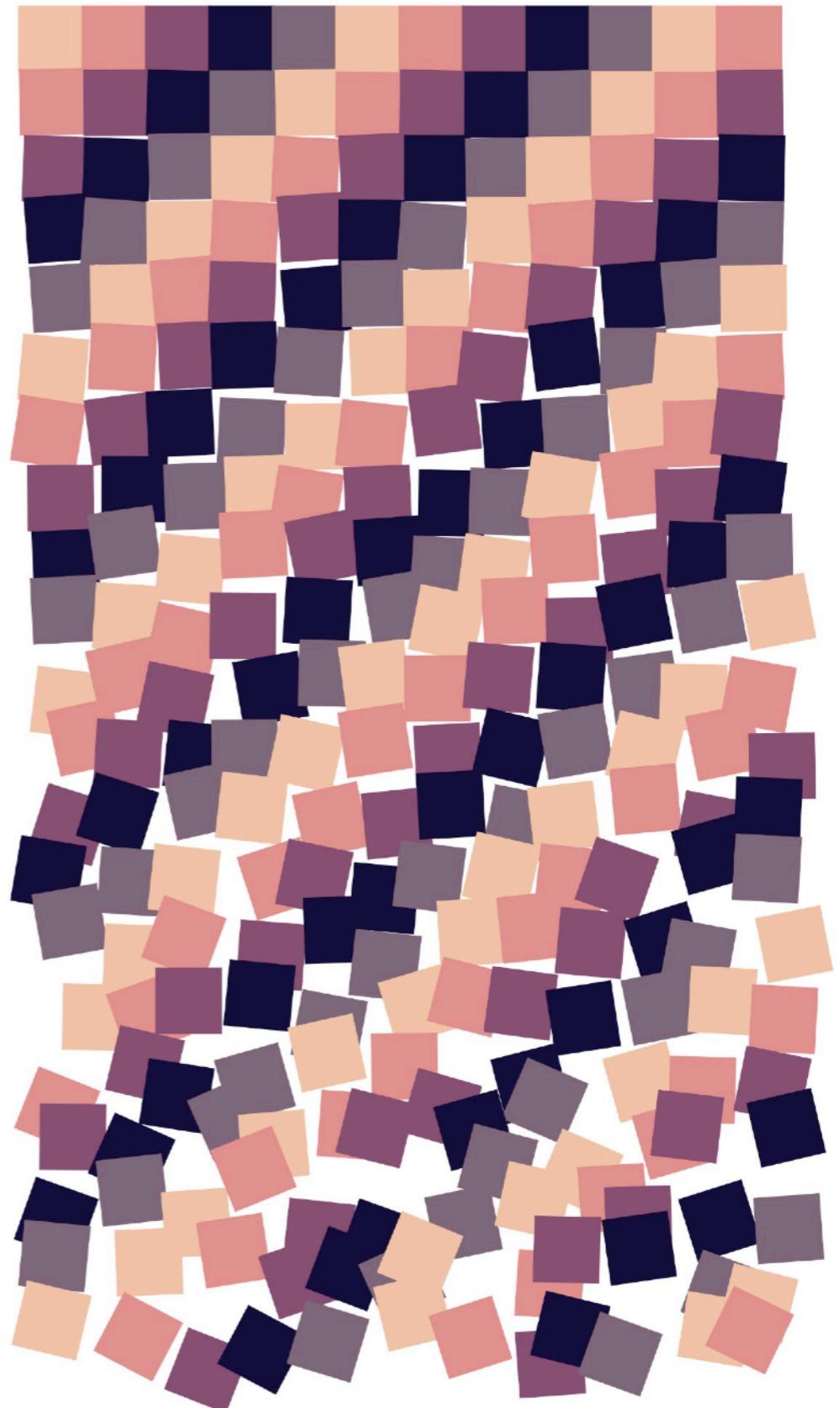
RECODE OF VERA MOLNAR “STRUCTURE DE QUADRILATERES” (1987)

# RECODING

COPYING DIRECTLY  
FROM WORKS OF ART  
GIVES THE ARTIST  
INSIGHT INTO THE  
CREATIVE PROCESS

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- GERALD KING



RECODE BY HEX6C

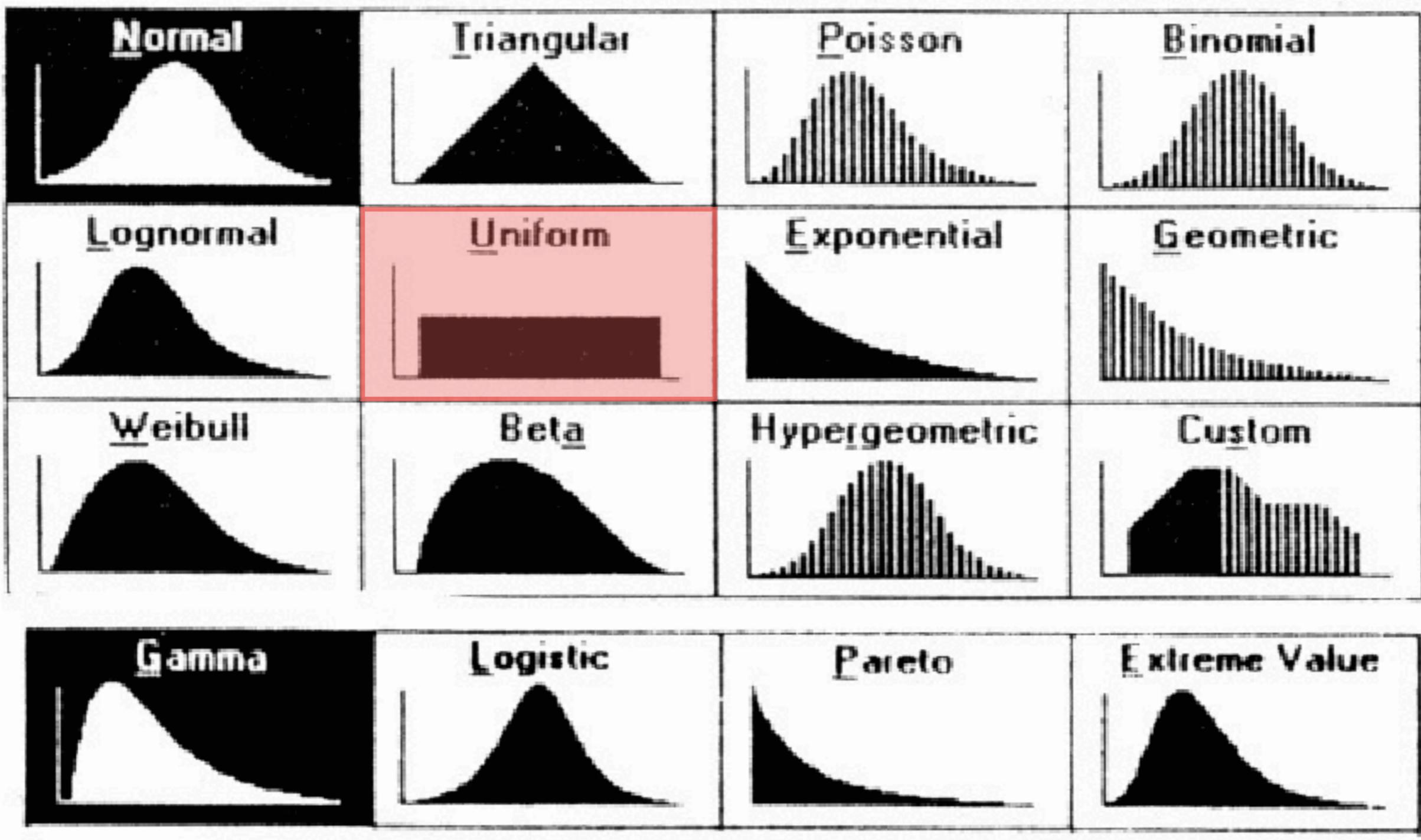
LIFE CANNOT BE CALCULATED.  
THAT'S THE BIG MISTAKE OUR  
CIVILIZATION MADE. WE NEVER  
ACCEPTED THAT RANDOMNESS IS  
NOT A MISTAKE IN THE EQUATION -  
IT IS PART OF THE EQUATION.

---

JEANETTE WINTERSON

- INTRODUCTION ...
  - THEORETICAL: DEFINITIONS
  - AESTHETIC: EXAMPLES IN ART
  - STRATEGIC: WHY USE RANDOMNESS?
  - PRACTICAL: USING RANDOMNESS ...
- 

## WRAPUP



SOURCE: MATILDE MARCOLLI

# END

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