AHST 4342-501 (27532)
History of Media and New Media Art
Spring 2018

Dr. Charissa N. Terranova
University of Texas at Dallas
Arts & Humanities

T-Th 1:00-2:15

Thursday 02/14/18

Discussion: Georges Perec's Thinking Machines

UT DALLAS

The University of Texas at Dallas
Art & Performance Office, JO 31
800 W. Campbell Road, Richardson, TX 75080

Comer Collection: Memory: Mystery, Magic and Make-believe

Curator: Anna Fritzel

selections from the Comer Collection honored photographer: Cig Harvey

Memories are unreliable, like dreams and deja vu. They can be hyper-real and surreal at the same time, creating mysterious visions, imagery, and emotions. The photographs in this exhibition speak to memory and the malleable past while connecting the viewer to the present.

Exhibition: February 12 - March 9, 2018
Anna Fritzel Gallery Talk: February 19, 4:30 p.m.
Reception: February 27, 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.
Honored Photographer Cig Harvey Lecture: February 27, 7:00 p.m.
Location: University Theatre Gallery (lobby)

Cig Harvey, *Scout & The Pomegranate Seeds*, 2014, 14x14 inches, photograph on paper

Gallery hours:

Monday - Friday . . . . . 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

For more information, ah.utdallas.edu or call 972-UTD-ARTS.
For assistance call 972-883-2982 or Texas Operator 1-800 RELAYTX.
UT Dallas is an equal opportunity/affirmative action university.

Next week, 02/20/18:

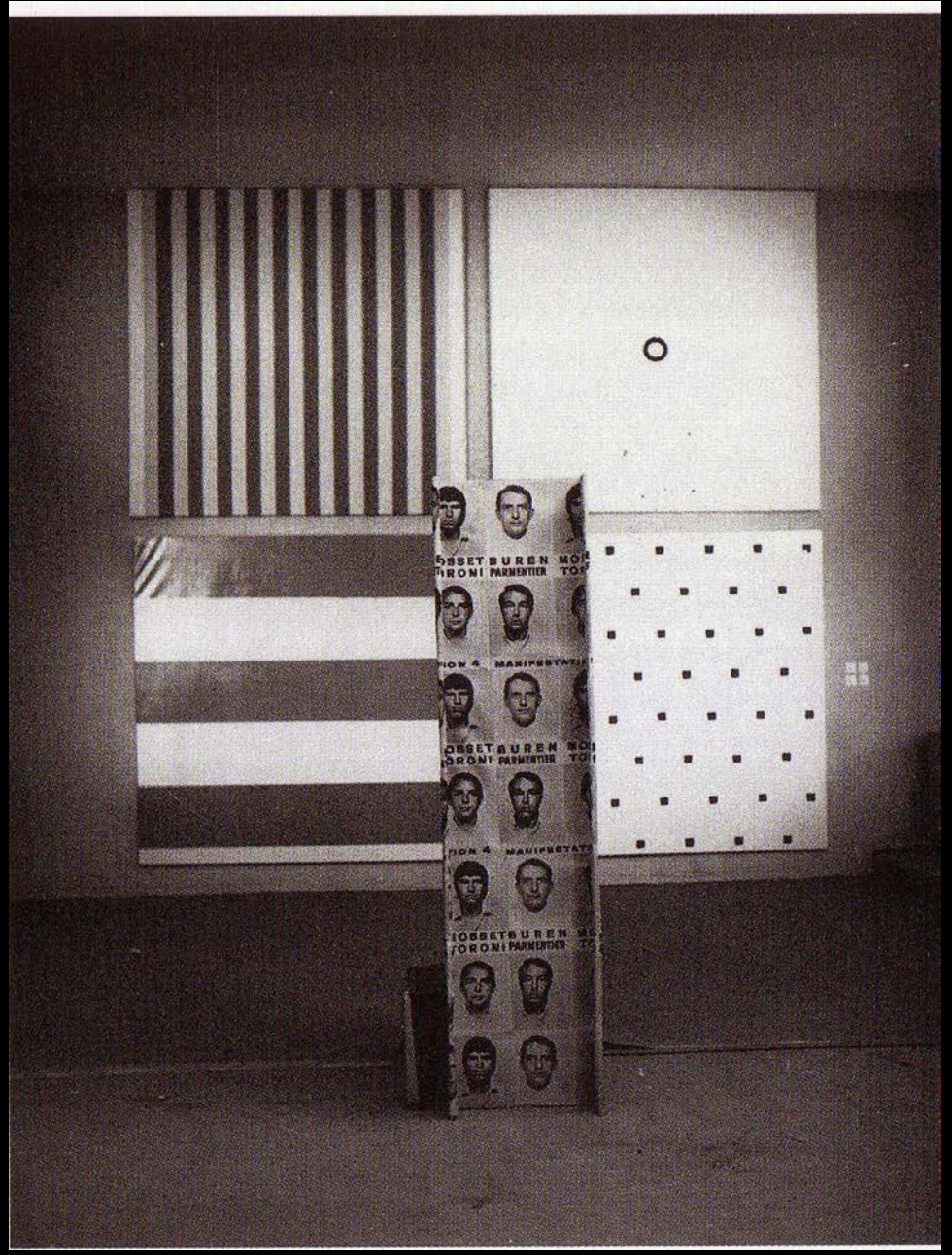
Margit Rosen, “ ‘They Have All Dreamt of the Machines – and Now the Machines Have Arrived’: New Tendencies – Computers and Visual Research, Zagreb, 1968-1969,” *Mainframe Experimentalism*, 90-111.

Georges Perec [1936-1982]

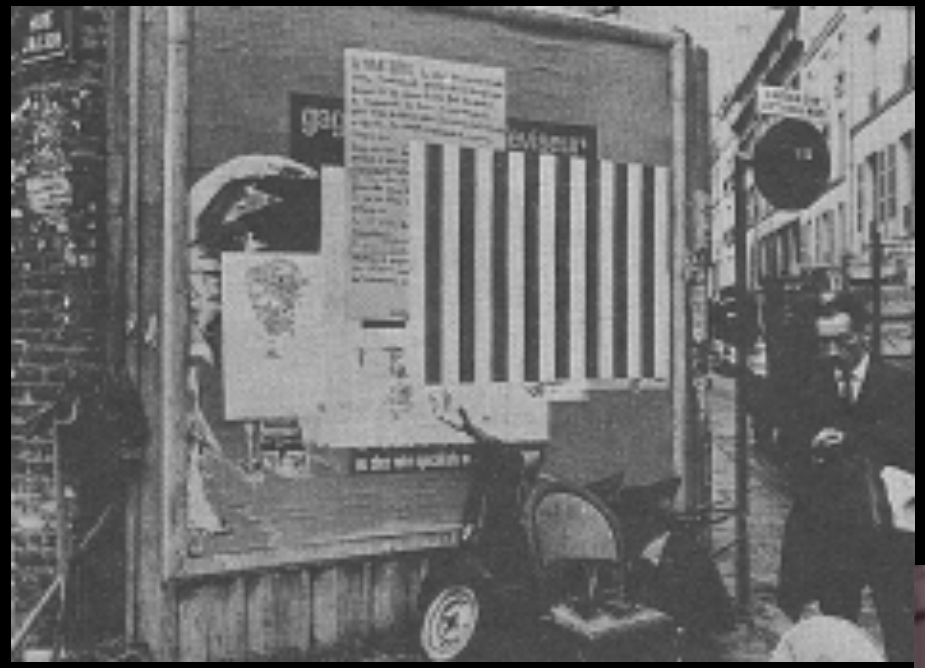
- French novelist, filmmaker, essayist
- Born in working-class neighborhood of Paris to Polish Jewish parents; both parents died in connection to WWII; He was adopted by his uncle.
- Oulipo: *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*; roughly translated: *"workshop of potential literature;"* founded 1960; French-speaking writers and mathematicians who seek to create works using constrained writing techniques

CONSTRAINTS

Constraints and Conceptualism 1965-present

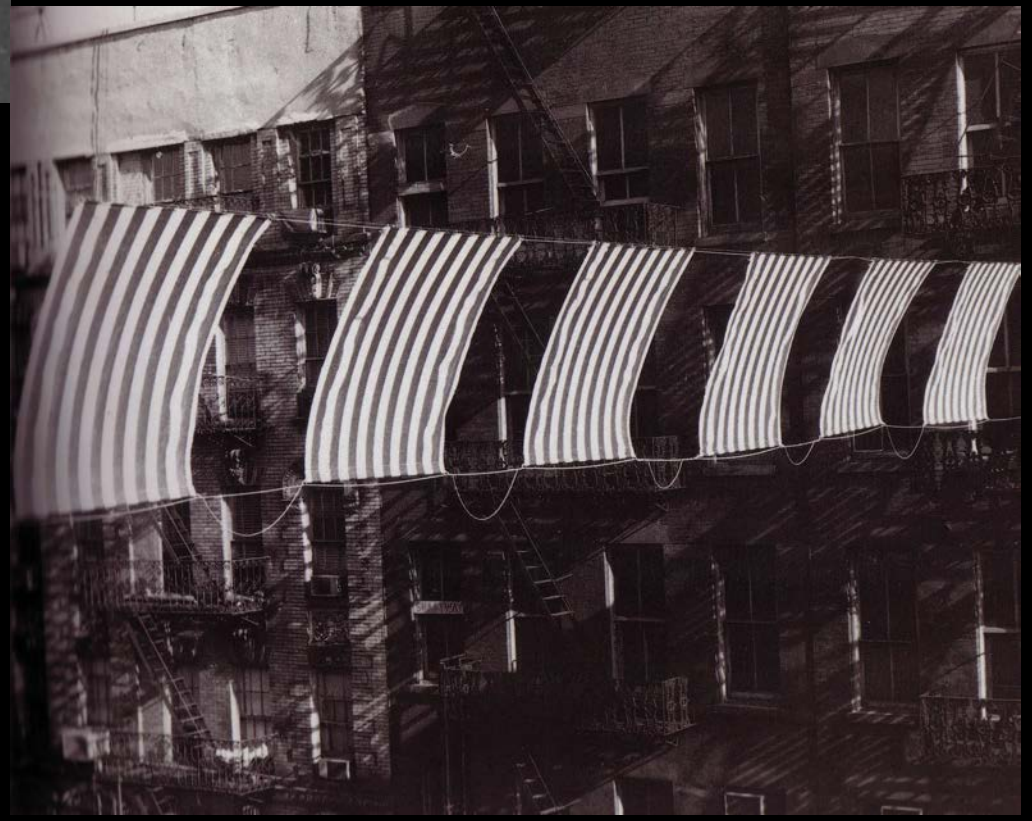


Installation of work by BMPT at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 1967

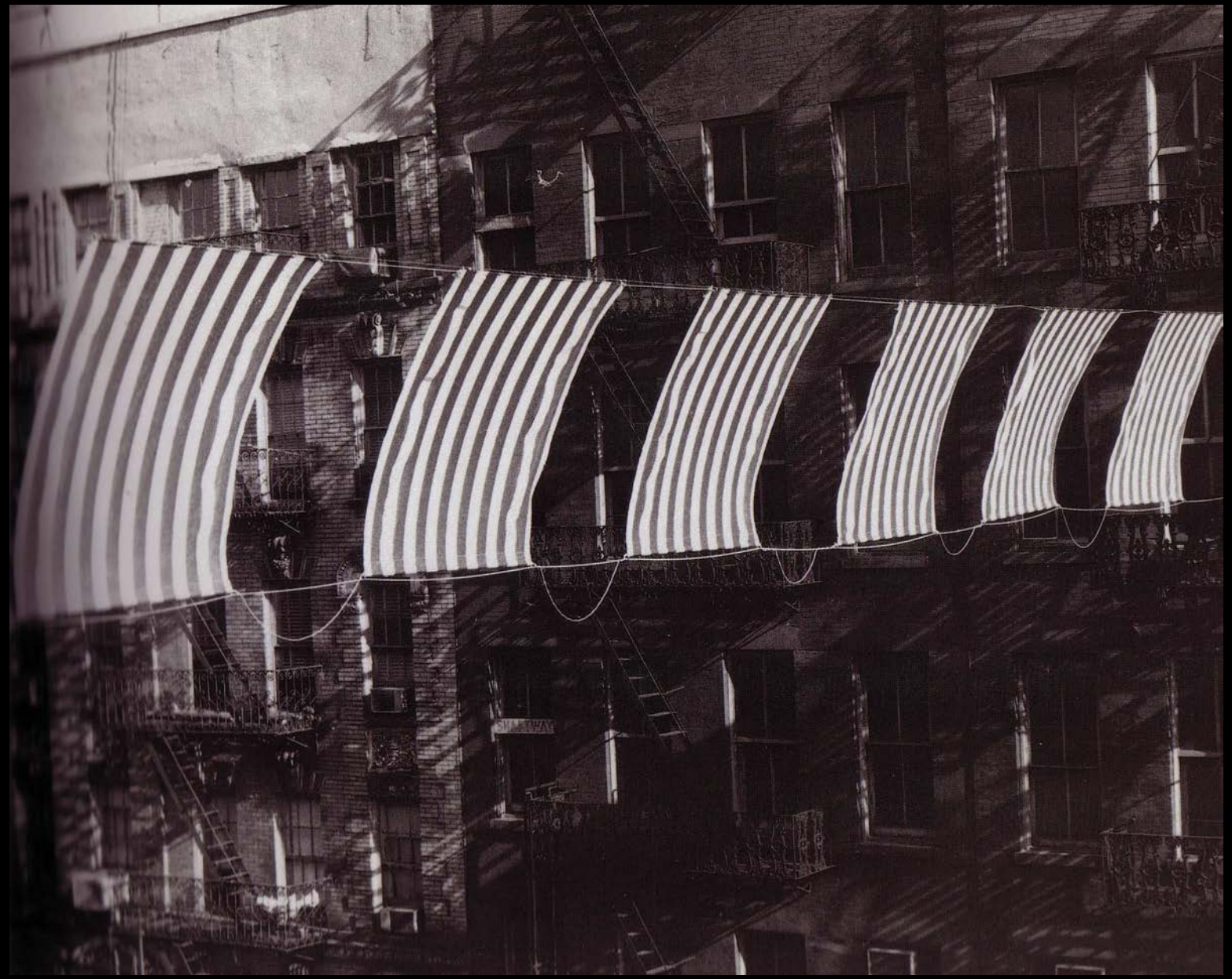


Daniel Buren, Poster, (1 of 200 in Paris), 1968

Daniel Buren, Photo-Souvenir, Within and Beyond the Frame, 1973



Daniel Buren, Photo-Souvenir, Within and Beyond the Frame, 1973



Daniel Buren, Photo-Souvenir, Within and Beyond the Frame, 1973

AL CHARVA
HAROLD
QUALITY SELLS AND BUILDS

Daniel Buren, Photo-Souvenir, To Transgress, 1976

Daniel Buren, Exhibition of an Exhibition, A Piece in 7 Pictures, 1972

Professor question: What happens to “meaning” in works of art driven largely by constraints?

Student writing: Perec’s projects became seemingly focused on wreaking havoc on meaning and the conception of authorship.

Student writing: By experimenting with technology in art are our technologies capable telling us something about human nature that we do not realize ourselves?

Daniel Buren, Photo-Souvenir of Painting-Sculpture, 1971

Daniel Buren, Eyes of the Storm, 2000-2005

Are their connections between (computational) constraints and the avant-garde?

Was Georges Perec avant-garde?

What is the role of “defamiliarization” (A. Goza) in the avant-garde and its tactics?

Student writing:

Why was Georges Perec so enthralled with the idea of defamiliarization via translation machines? What does he stand to gain from this?

By taking something so familiar to a group of people and changing it in such a way that its still recognizable but is wrong, it is easy to illicit a reaction from said group of people.

Professor response: Was Perec only after shock value?

Constraints and the Reshaping of Authorship

Student writing (and more): Why was Perec against actual computers? How exactly does his unique negotiation of computers and computer logic affect his creativity?

Student writing:

Georges Perec was a French writer who held a **practical view of life**…

Professor response:

How was Perec “practical”? (I love this idea…)

Student writing:

Georges Perec was a French writer who held a **practical view of life**, a view that one does not need a mind blessed by the Muses to create. All it takes is hard work and a tool.

What does the act of initiating constraints – creating a machine – do to art?

What does it do to the act of making art?

P.A.L.F. [automatic production of French literature] is of interest as the first explicitly mechanical device entertained by Perec for the production of literary texts, and also as a symptom of the ‘60’s fascination with the potential of the signifier to subvert, overturn, and generally wreak havoc with meaning and authorial intention.

-- Bellos, 40

Retinal Art versus Anti-Retinal Art

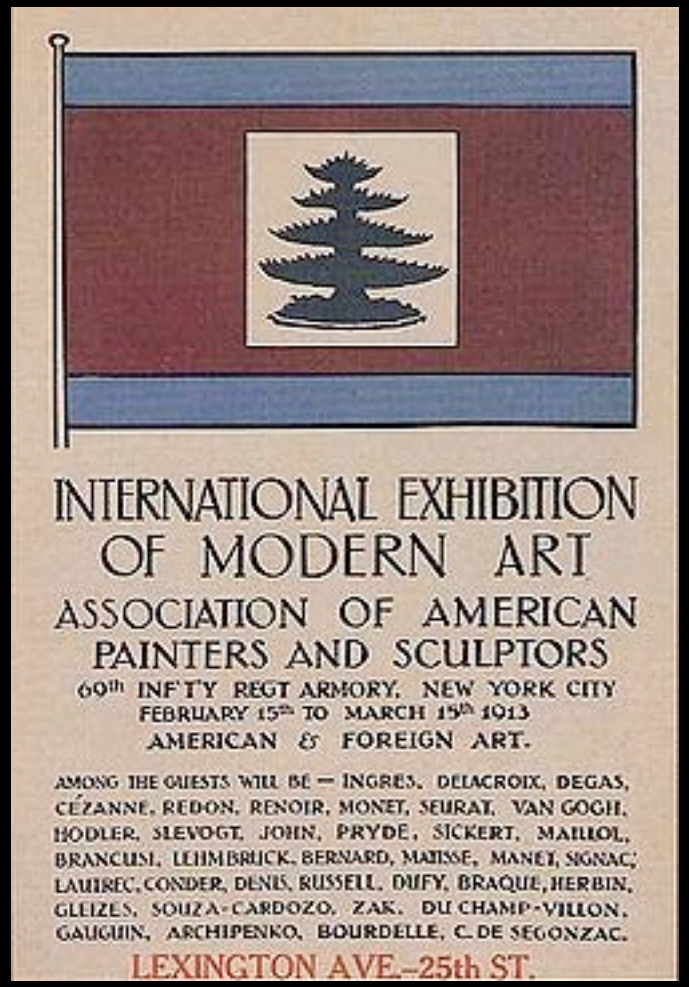
Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968)
player 1911

Duchamp, Portrait of chess

Readymade

Duchamp wanted, he said, "to put art back in the service of the mind."

Duchamp, Bicycle Wheel, 1913



Marcel Duchamp, Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2, 1912

SEEING NEW YORK WITH A CUBIST
The Rude Descending a Staircase
(Rush Hour at the Subway)

32
USA
Armory Show 1913
1998
© USPS 1998

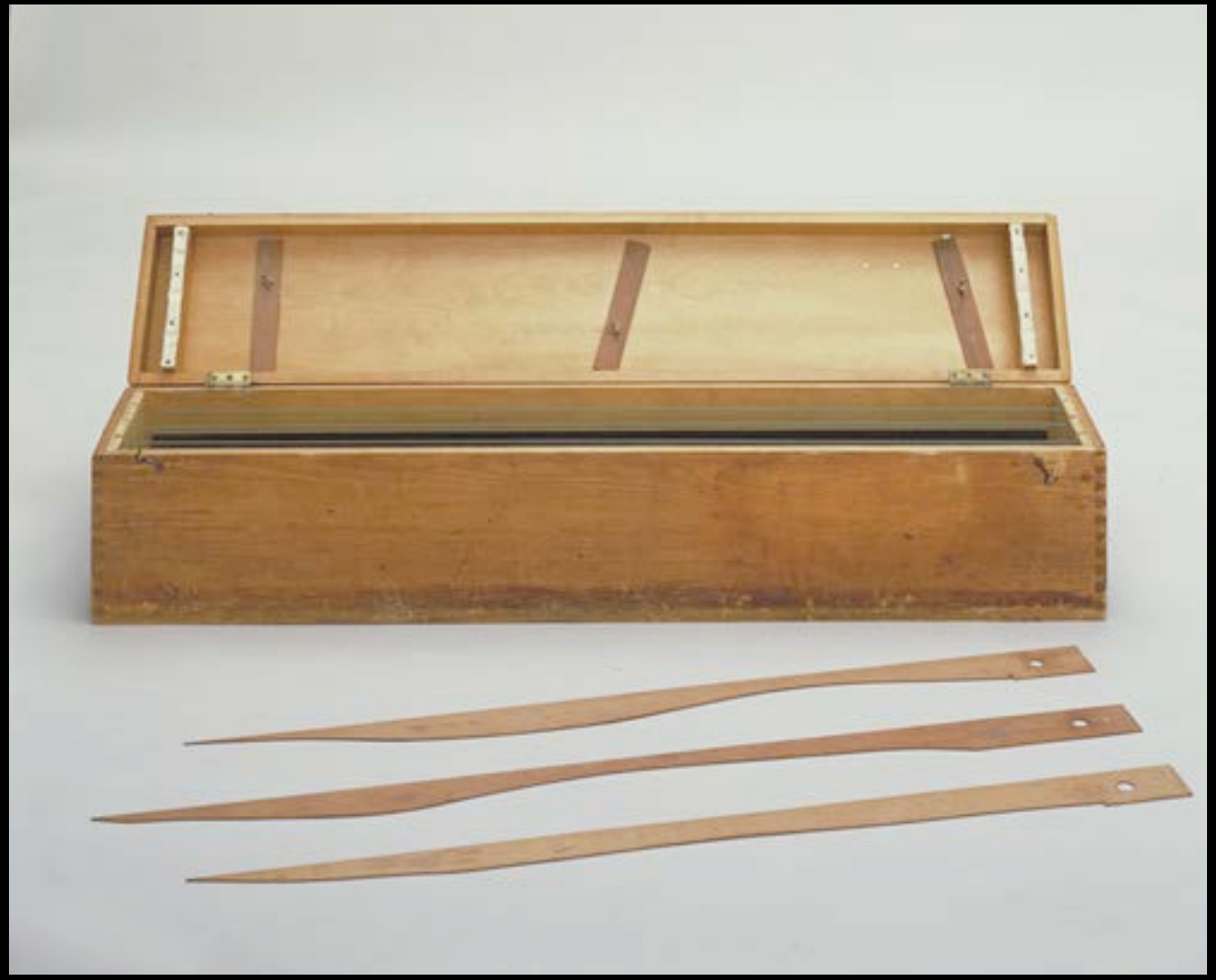
Eliot Elisofon, Marcel Duchamp Walking down Stairs mimicking Nude Descending a Staircase, 1952

Gerhard Richter, Ema (Nude Descending a Staircase), 1992

Readymade

Duchamp wanted, he said, "to put art back in the service of the mind."

Duchamp, Bicycle Wheel, 1913



Duchamp, Three Standard Stoppages, 1913-14

It is "a joke about the meter (3.2 ft)," Duchamp glibly noted about this piece, but his premise for it reads like a theorem: "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."

Computational Logic/Conceptual Computers/Digital Computers

Are these tools and resources useful for reductionism or hashing out and revealing greater complexity?

Student writing: While Perec's work explicitly avoided physical machinery, it nonetheless displayed the qualities of a theoretical one. Much of Perec's work seems to focus on the reductive.

Professor response: Can we distinguish here between the reductive and reductionism?

REDUCTIONISM VS. COMPLEXITY

Readymade

How is Duchcamp's readymade a constraint?

Duchamp, Fountain, 1917

Marcel Duchamp, Fountain, 1917

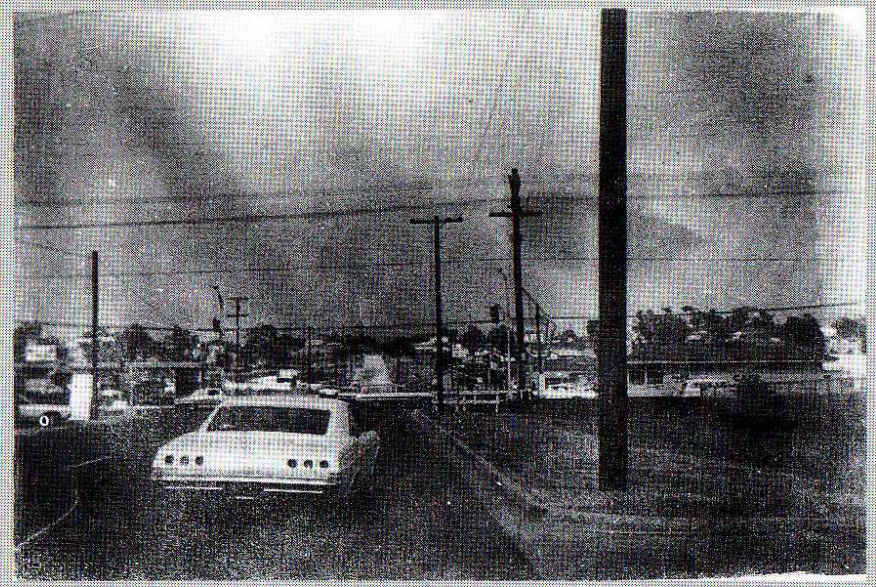
Bruce Nauman, Self Portrait as a Fountain, 1966-70

Student writing: Will the ever-advancing wave of technology render the arts, among other human systems obsolete? In other words, is Perec right about his theories over computers and creativity?

Professor response: Are you implicitly saying that Perec's deployment of computational logic is symptomatic of the death of art?

John Baldessari, The Back of All the Trucks While Driving from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara, 1963

ECON-O-WASH
14 TH AND HIGHLAND
NATIONAL CITY CALIF.

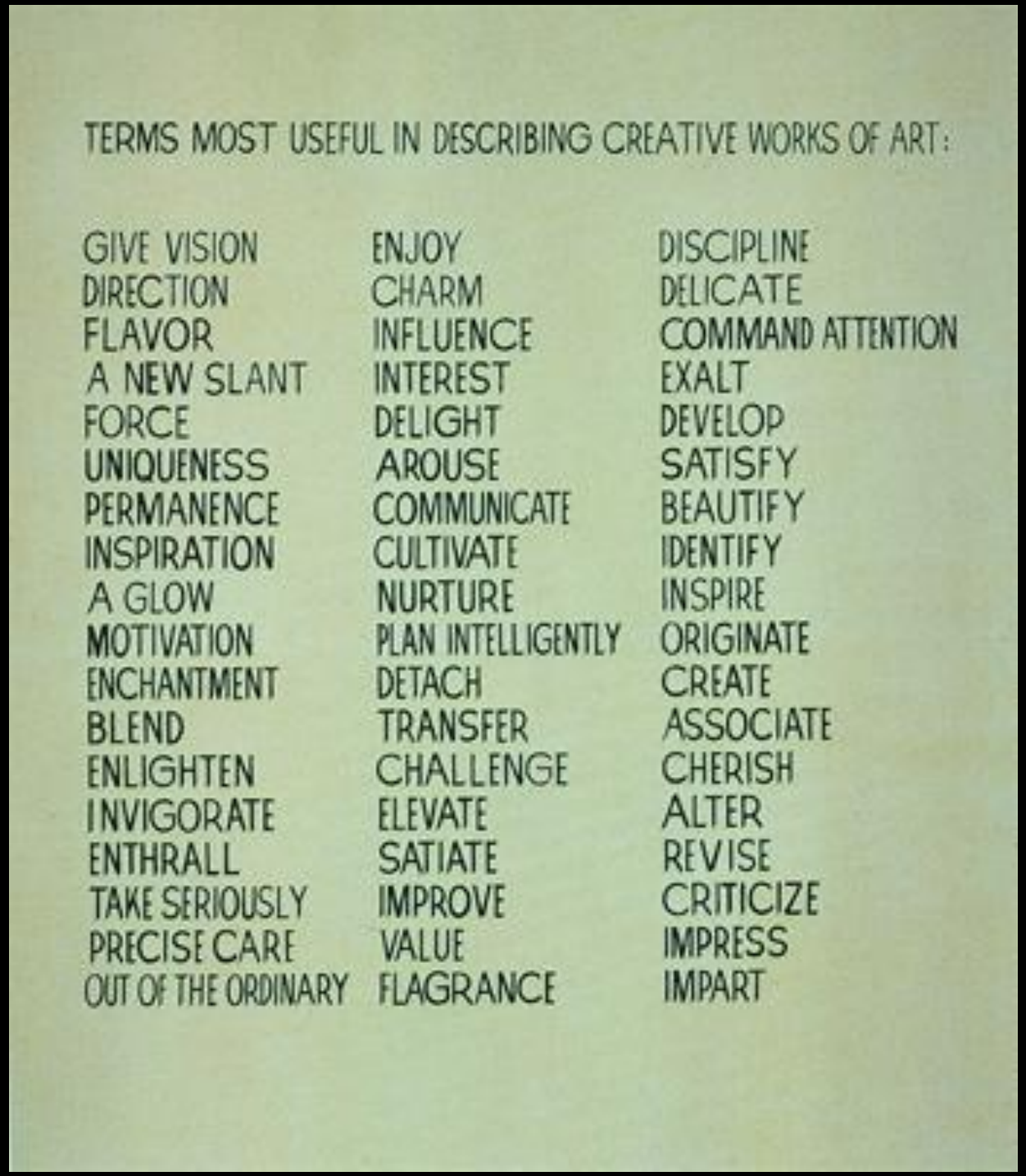


LOOKING EAST ON 4TH AND C
CHULA VISTA, CALIF.

John Baldessari, National City Series, 1966-68

John Baldessari, Quality Material, 1966-68

Student writing: How far can language bend before it becomes unusable? Can computers mimic actual human language – in its idiomatic, vernacular form?



John Baldessari, Terms Most Useful in Describing Creative Works of Art, 1966-68

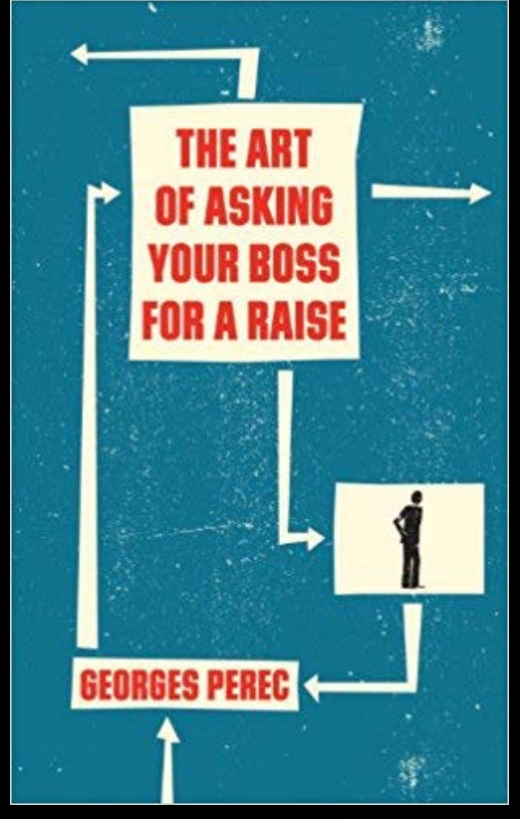
Student writing: The larger implication of Perec's theory is that every sentence can be created using base-form language. [Yet…] Any machine developed to truly understand language would need to conform to the regional standards of the location in which it was being implemented?

What role do algorithms play in Georges Perec’s practice? …In his unique take on writing machines?

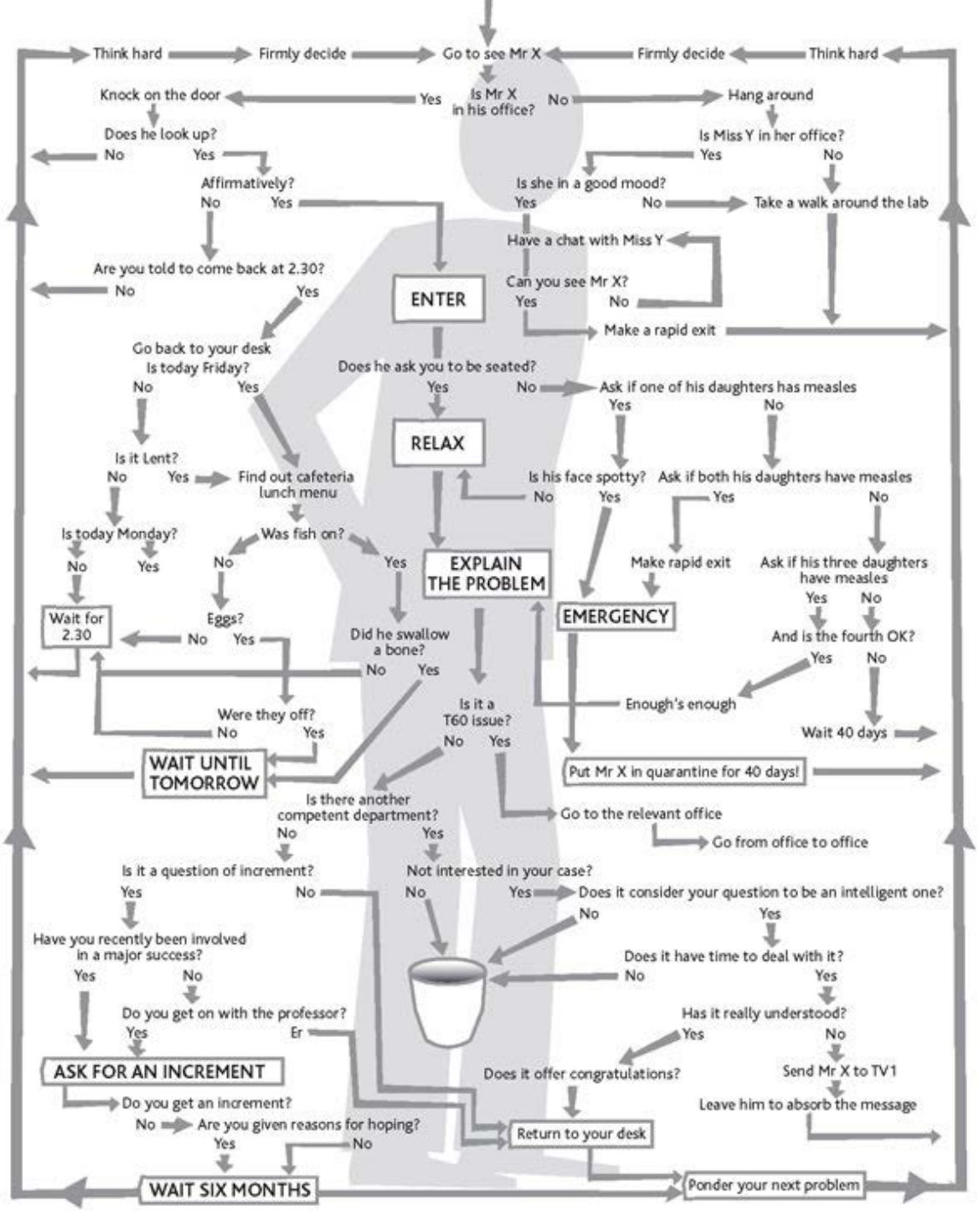
...Perec was approached by the Humanities Computing Center of the French National Research Council, which wanted a writer to experiment with an algorithm as a writing device – presumably as part of a broader program to bring computing and the arts into more fruitful cooperation. To judge by the tone of the letter he wrote about the project to his German translator Eugen Helmle, Perec seems to have learned from this commission what an algorithm and flowchcart was [Bellos, 42]:

> It consists of a certain number of propositions that can take either a yes or no for an answer, each answer having certain consquences. The concatenation of causes and effects and the choice of answers are represented by arrows that are the only syntactic connectors between the propositions. In brief it is a tree structure, a network, a labyrinth, and the “reader” chooses one route among all the possible routes, the totality of possible routes being presented SIMULTANEOUSLY on the flow-chart. [Perec, 43]

What then became of Perec’s algorithm?

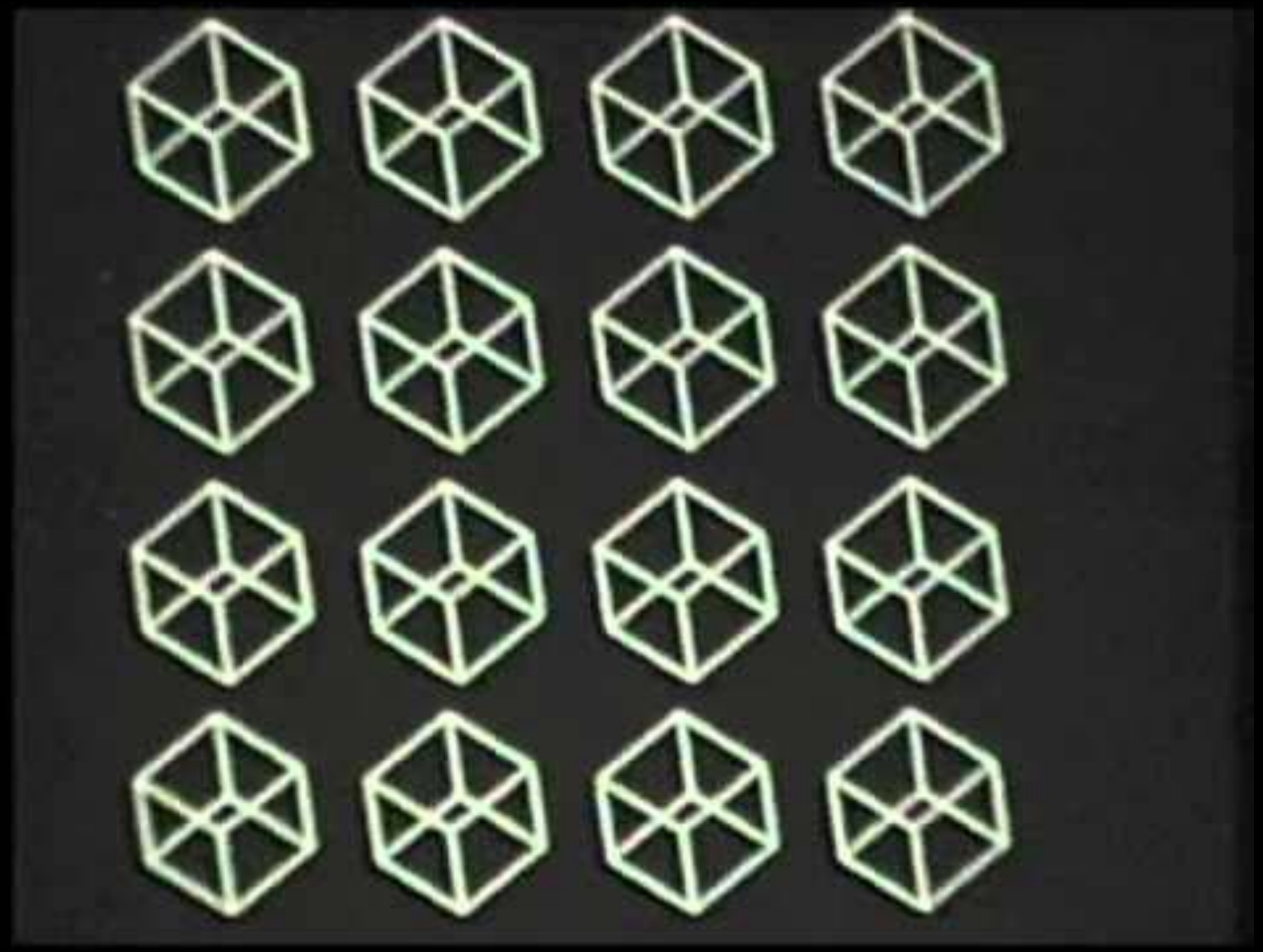


having carefully weighed the pros and cons you gird up your loins and make up your mind to go and see your head of department to ask for a raise so you go to see your head of department let us assume to keep things simple—for we must do our best to keep things simple—that his name is mr xavier that's to say mister or rather mr x so you go to see mr x it's one or t'other either mr x is at his desk or mr x is not at his desk so all you can do is stand in the corridor waiting for him to come back or come in but let us suppose not that he never comes in that case there would be but one solution to go back to your own desk and wait for the afternoon or the morrow to launch your campaign afresh but as is often the case that he takes his time in which case all you can really do instead of walking up and down in the corridor is to go and see your colleague ms y whom we shall henceforth call ms wye to give a touch of human warmth to our schematic demonstration[10]

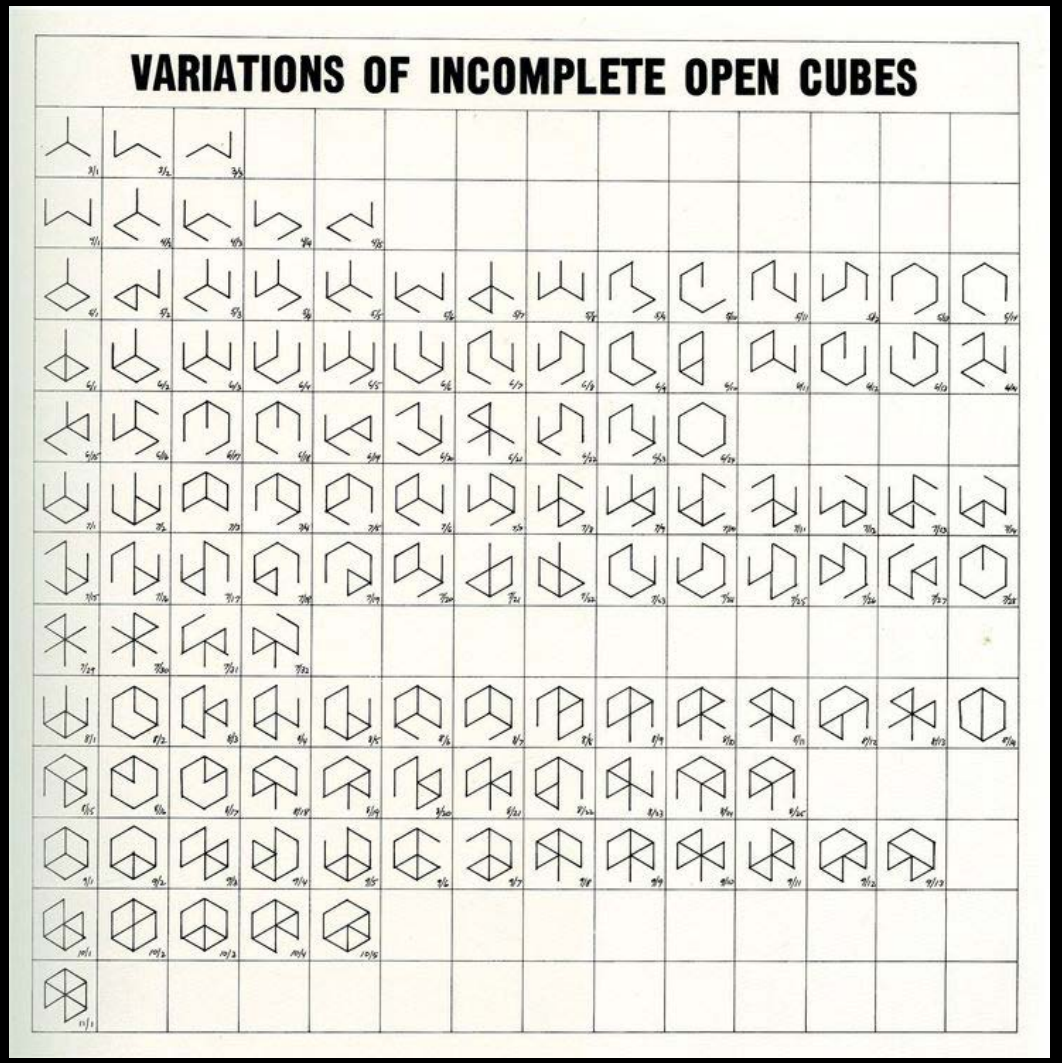


What aesthetic does the algorithm yield in Perec’s work?

Could we envision an algorithmic aesthetics?

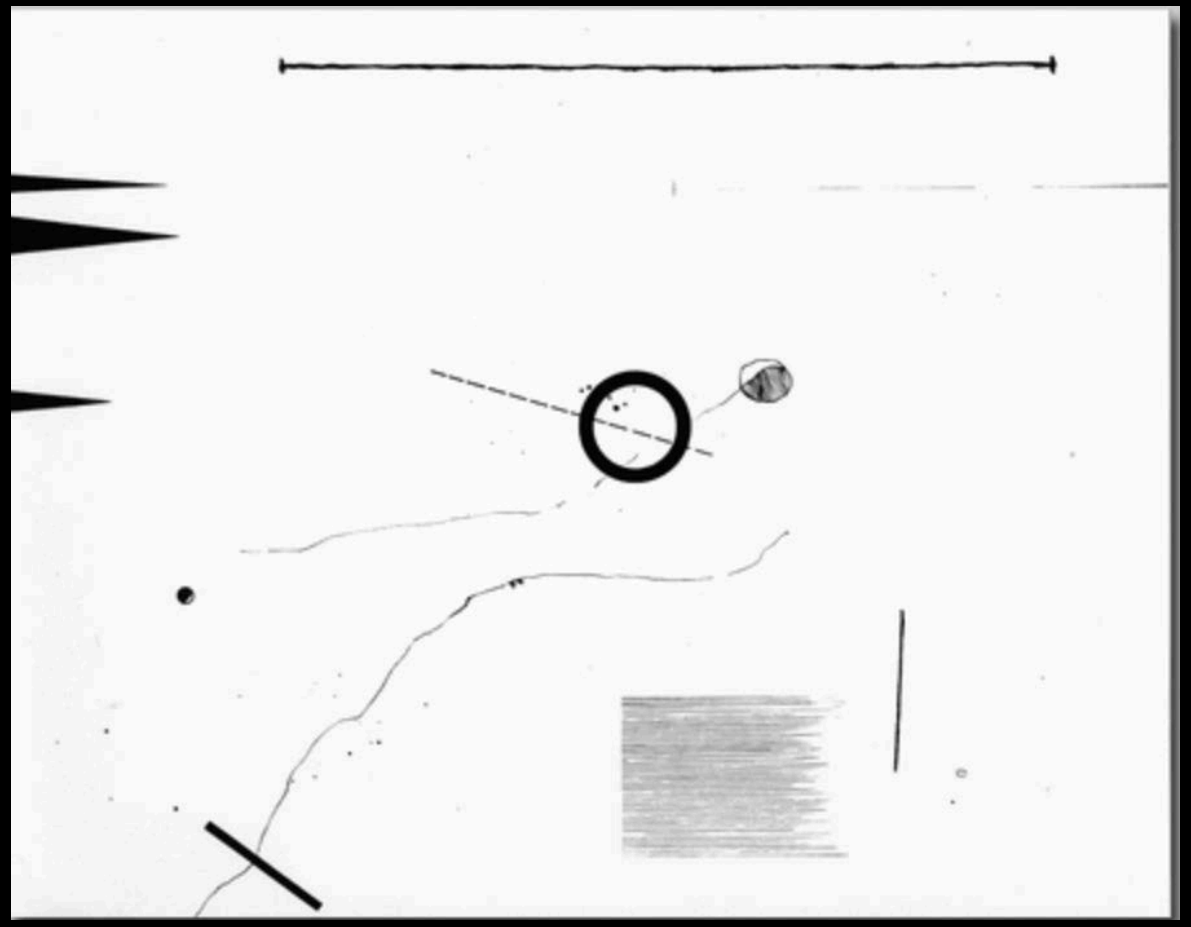


Manfred Mohr, Cubic Limit, film, 1974
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4M28FEJFF8

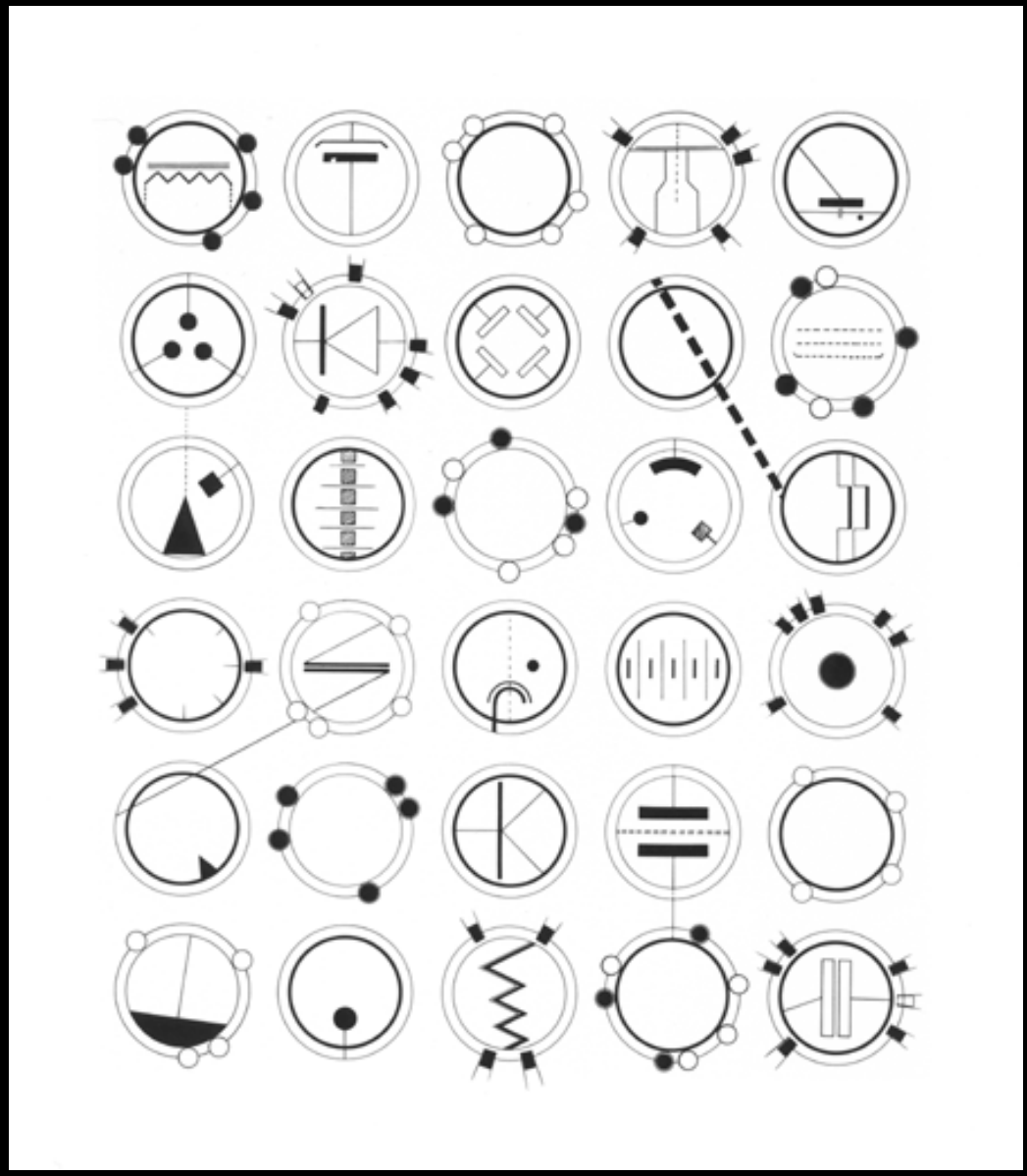


Sol LeWitt, Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes, 1974

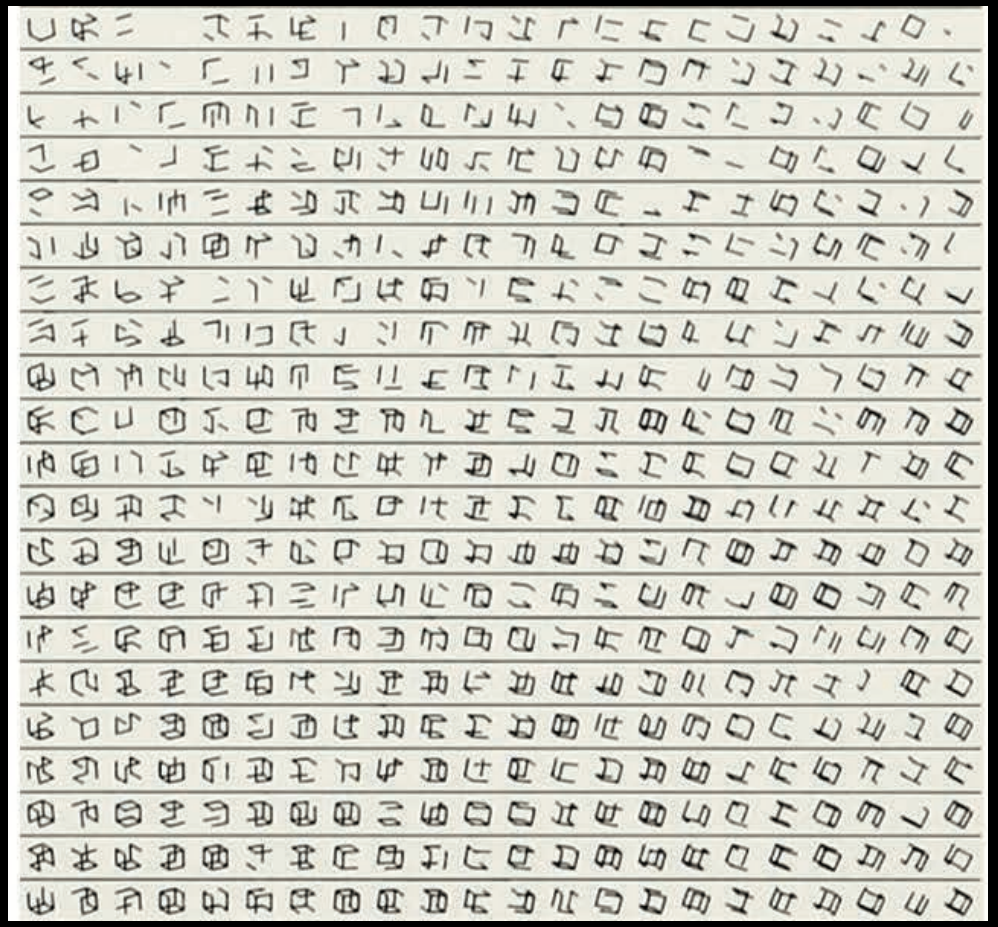
Born in Germany in 1938, NY-based artist Manfred Mohr began his career as an action painter influenced by jazz and Abstract Expressionism.



Manfred Mohr, Bild 12/366, Tempera/Leinwand, 1966

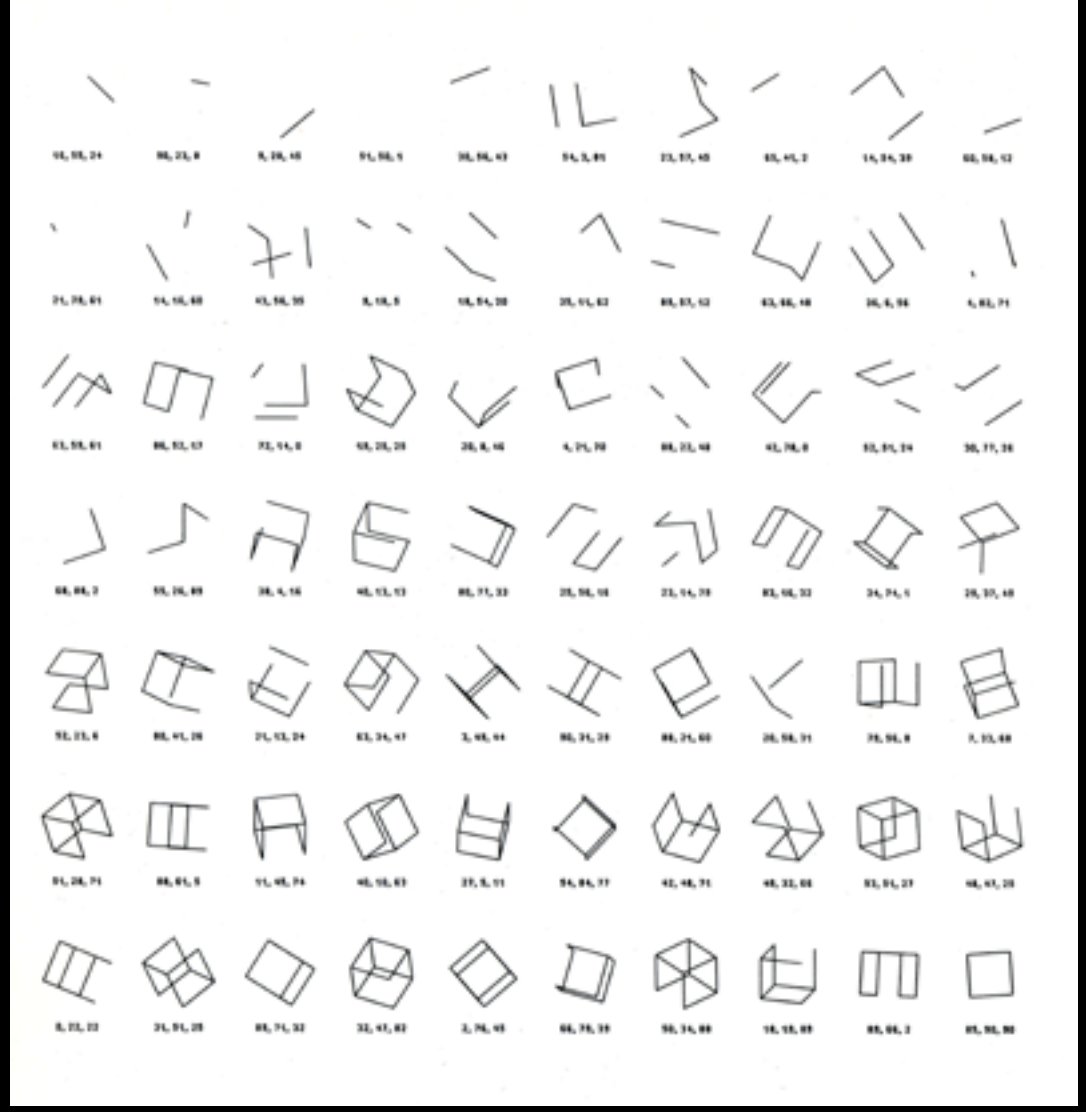


Manfred Mohr, Zeichnung A, Ink and paper, 1967

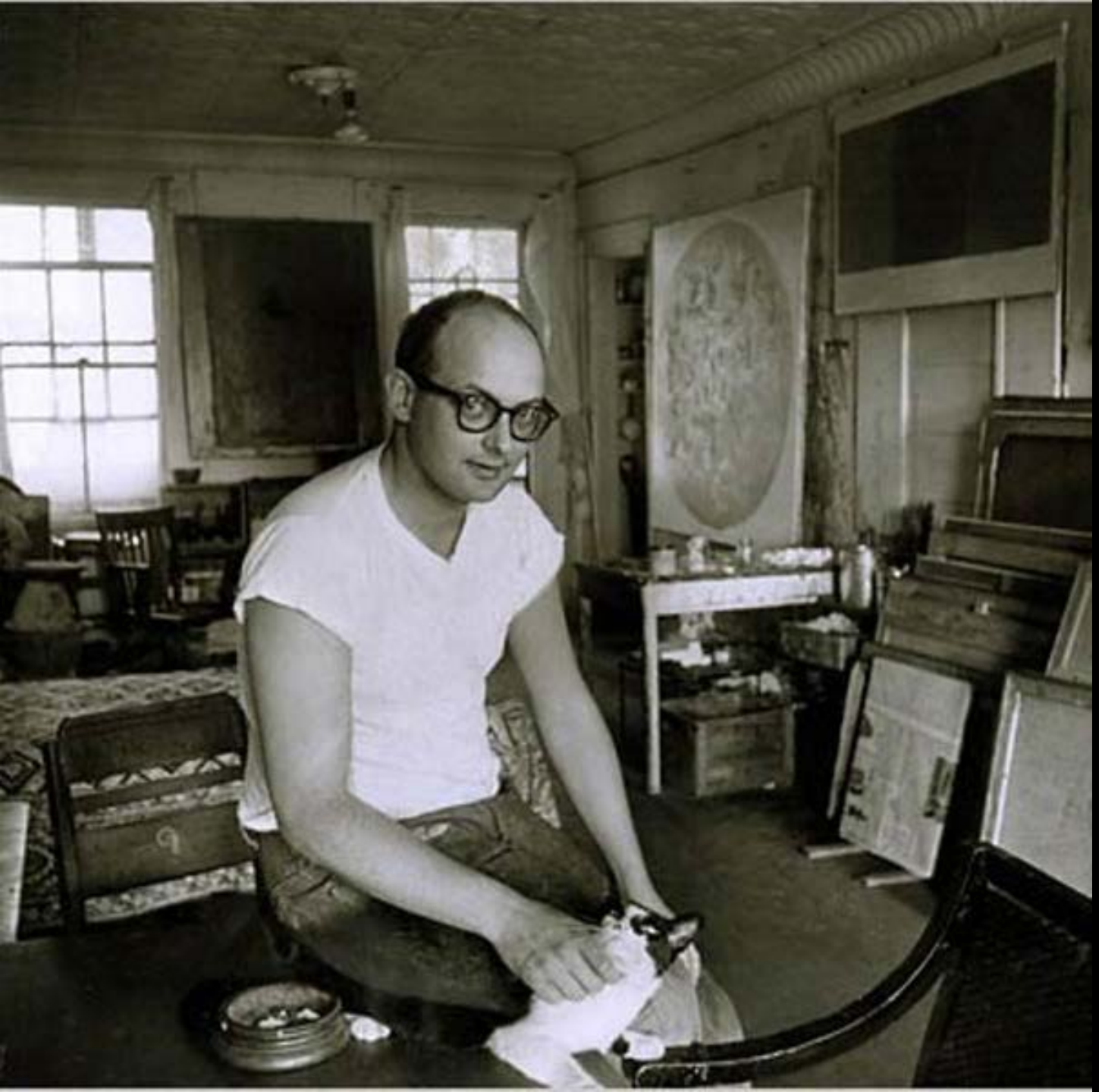


Manfred Mohr, *P-155-bb*, 1974

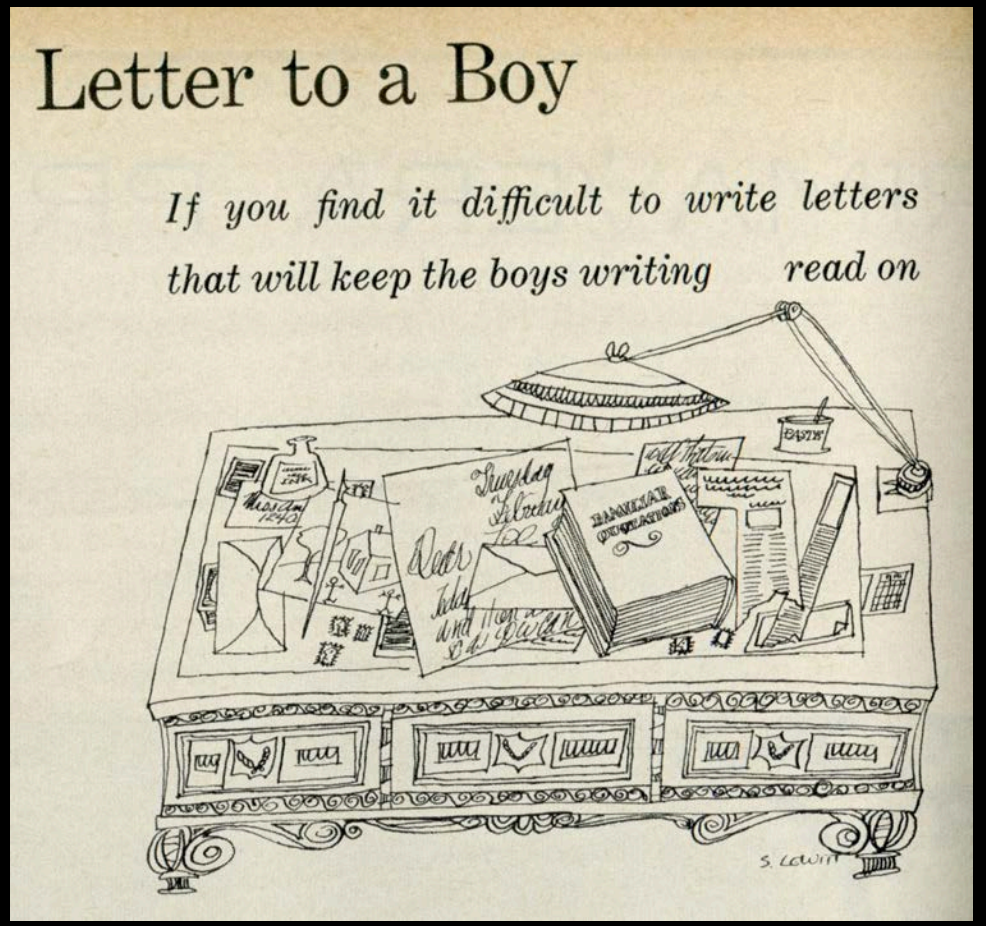
Using the combinatorics of the elements of a cube which have been broken down into minute particles of lines, Mohr accomplishes a type of storyboard for an abstract animation. As a two-dimensional surface, however, it plots a gradual intensification of the lines in the center. The reduction of the title to character combinations reflects Mohr's interest in aesthetic and semiotic questions and results, as opposed to the production of art-works in the traditional sense. What counts for Mohr is not the single graph, or line, but the complete ensemble of statistical relationships that manifest themselves in a series of aesthetic constructions and structures. (Media Art Net)



In Cubic Limit, Manfred Mohr introduced the cube into his work as a "fixed system with which signs are generated. In the first part of this work phase (1972-76), an alphabet of signs is created from the twelve lines of a cube. In some works, statistics and rotation are used in the algorithm to generate signs. In others, combinatorial, logical and additive operators generate the global and local structures of the images." (Ed Shanken)

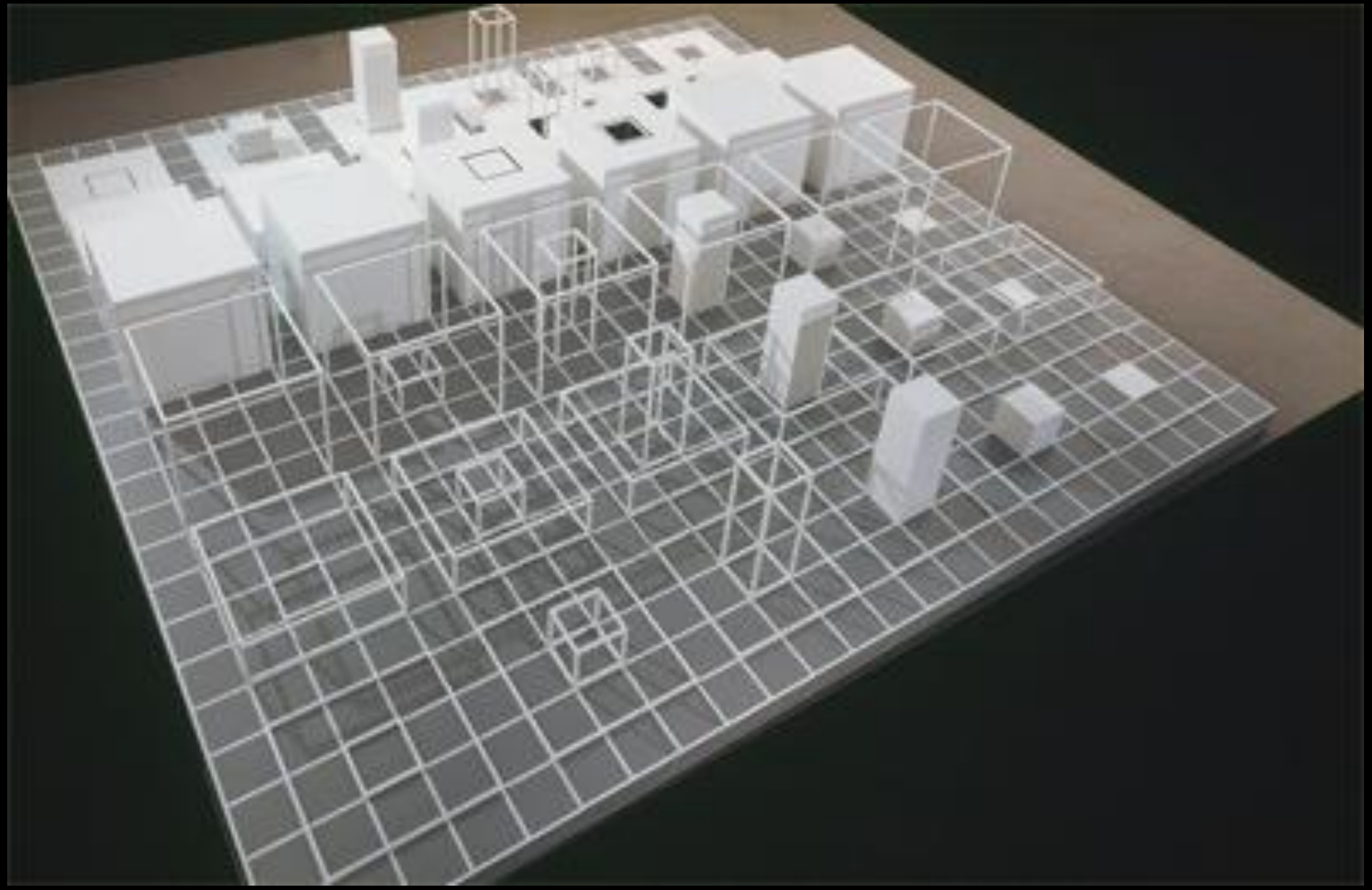


In 1953, Sol Lewitt (1928-2007) moved to New York City, where he studied at the Cartoonists and Illustrators School (now SVA/School of Visual Arts) and worked for Seventeen Magazine, making paste-ups, mechanicals and Photostats. He was then hired as a graphic designer in IM Pei's architecture firm.

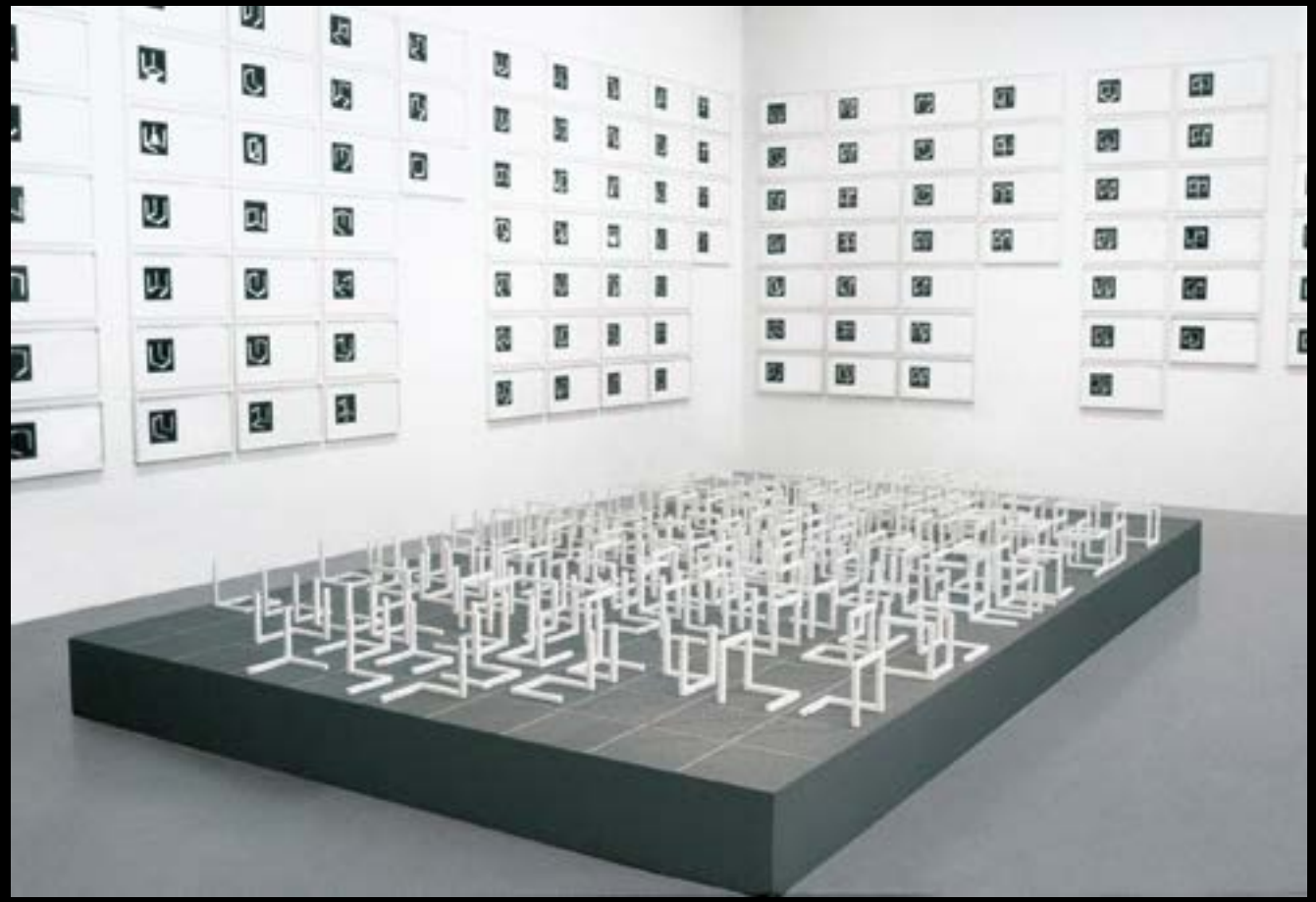


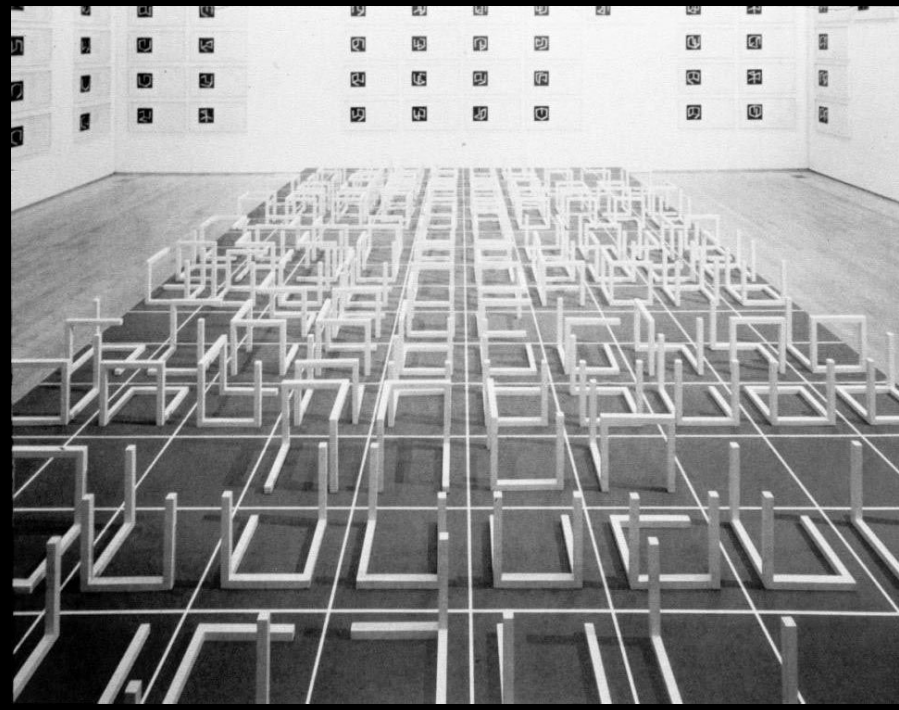
Sol LeWitt, Seventeen magazine illustration, February 1955

Sol LeWitt, Untitled, 1966



Sol LeWitt, Serial Project No. 1 ABCD, 1966

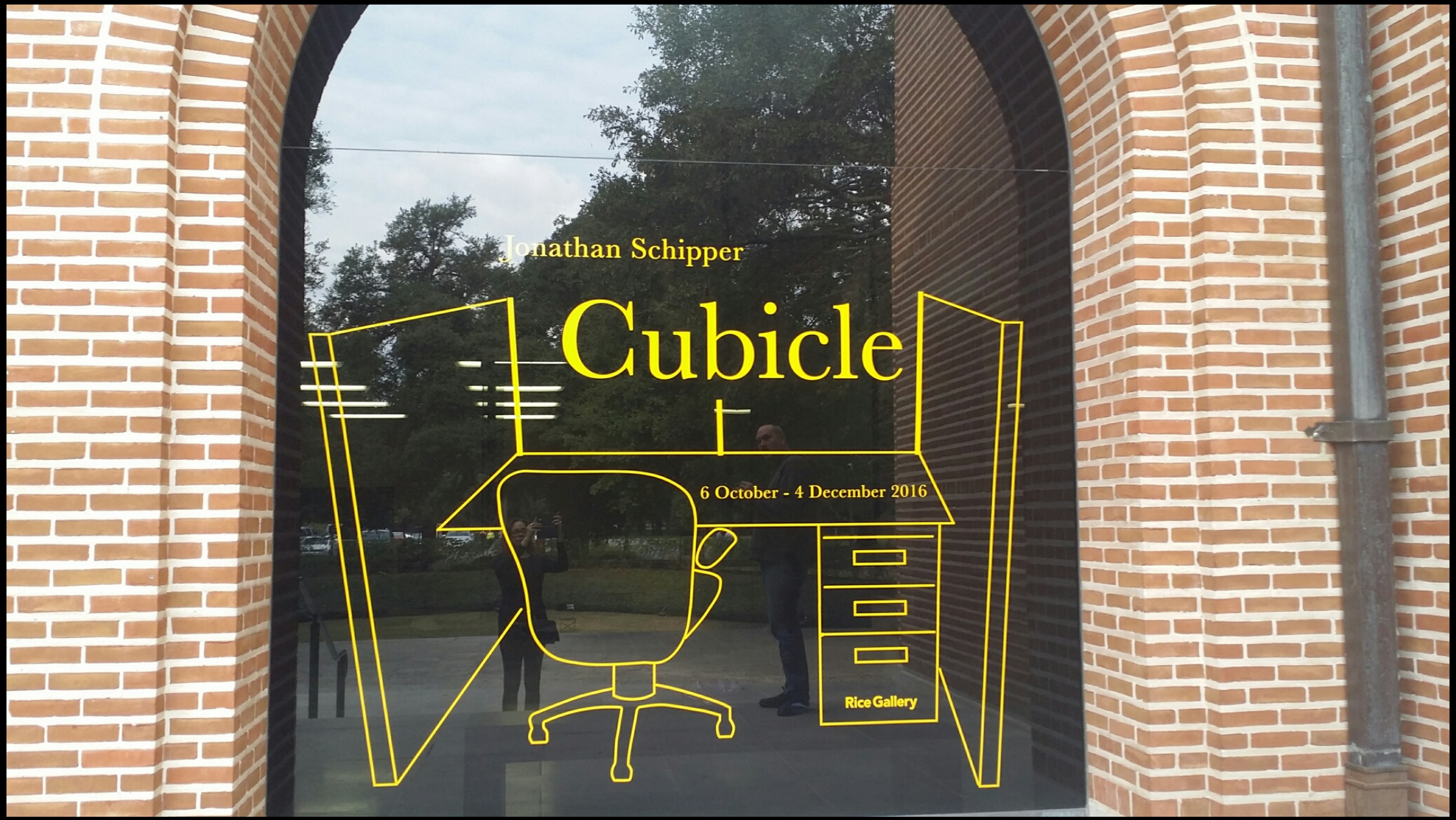




Sol Lewitt, Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes , 1974
Wood sculptures with white paint (122 pieces)
Each piece: 20.3 cm square 8" square
Framed photographs and drawings (131 pieces),
Each piece: 66 x 35.6 cm 26 x 14" Base: 30.5 x 304.8 x 548.6 cm 12 x 120 x 216"
Each of the 122 sculptural forms is derived by subtracting one or more of the lines or edges from the cube’s basic unitary form. An idea is systematically translated and deployed into a variety of media and scales to become, in LeWitt's words, "a machine that makes the art.” (Ed Shanken)

Aesthetics of Algorithms
and
Aesthetics of Tedium

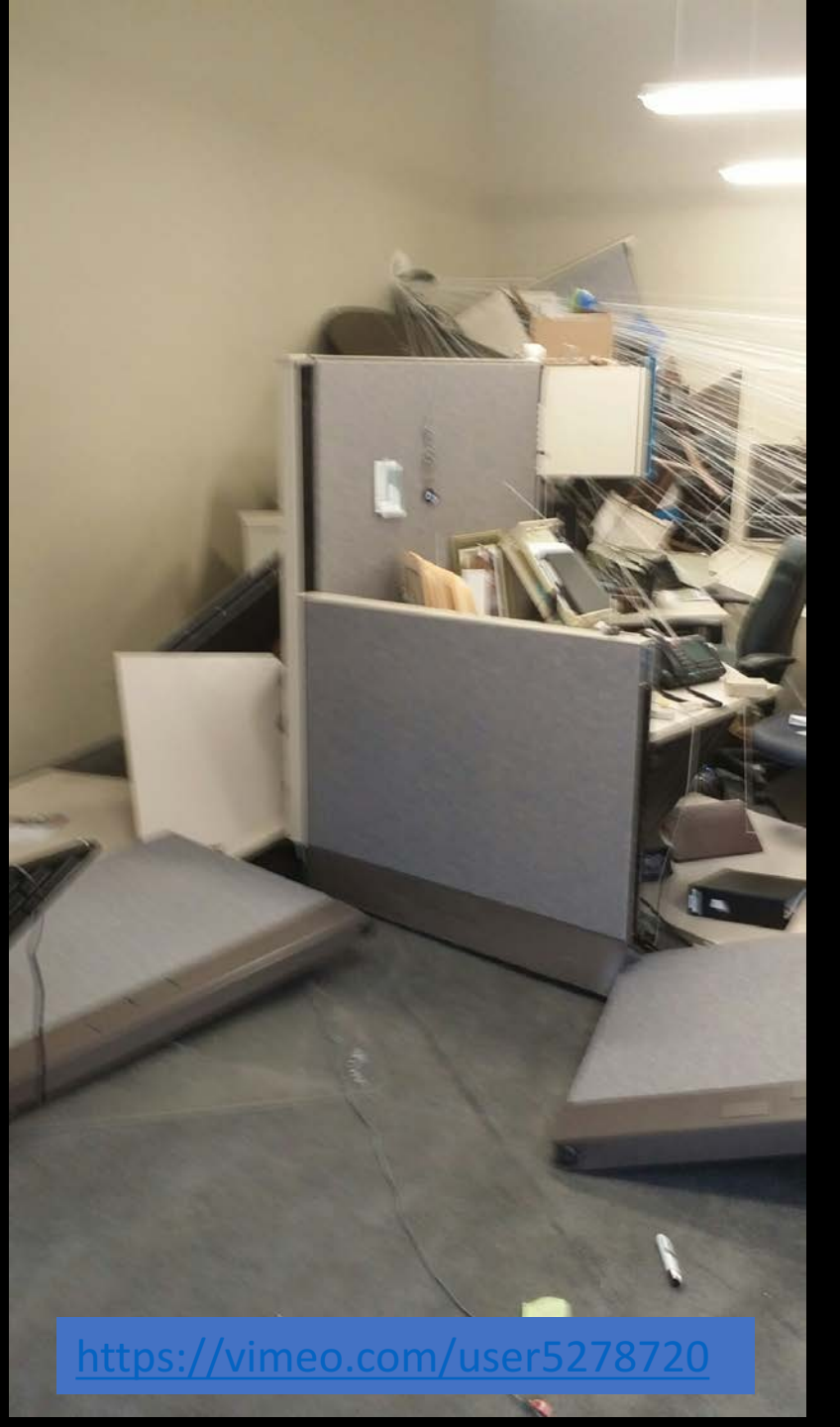
How do ideas of tedium, technocracy, and bureaucracy relate back to Georges Perec's work as a writer?


Jonathan Schipper
Cubicle
6 October - 4 December 2016
Rice Gallery

Jonathan Schipper, The Slow Inevitable Death of Muscle, 2009

REMINGTON

UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE



https://vimeo.com/user5278720