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

Tuesday 02/27/18

Discussion

New Tendencies, Op Art, and Gestalt Psychology

Geometric Abstraction Mid 20th Century

French *Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel* [GRAV], Italian Gruppo N and Gruppo T, German Zero Group, Spanish Equipo 57, Dutch NUL, and the American Anonima

Perception
Gestalt
Kinetics/Movement
Process
Information

Op Art
Responsive Eye
New Tendencies
Neo-Constructivism

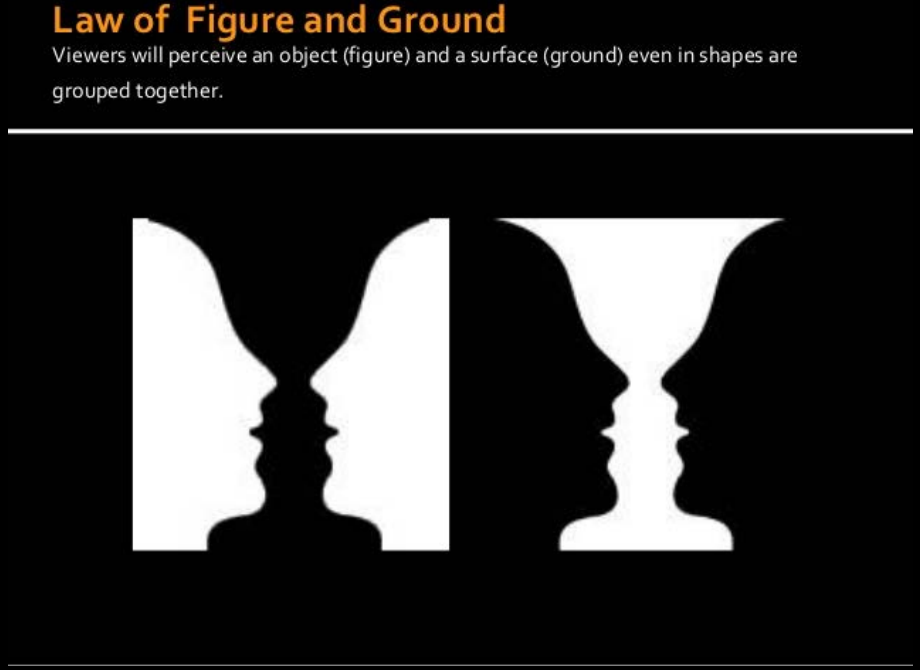
GESTALT

GESTALT

an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts; 1920s: from German *Gestalt*, literally 'form, shape.'

The **principles of grouping** (or **Gestalt laws of grouping**) are a set of principles in psychology, first proposed by Gestalt psychologists to account for the observation that humans naturally perceive objects as organized patterns and objects, a principle known as Prägnanz (German for 'pithiness'). Gestalt psychologists argued that these principles exist because the mind has an innate disposition to perceive patterns in the stimulus based on certain rules. These principles are organized into five categories: Proximity, Similarity, Continuity, Closure, and Connectedness.

FIGURE/GROUND RELATIONSHIPS



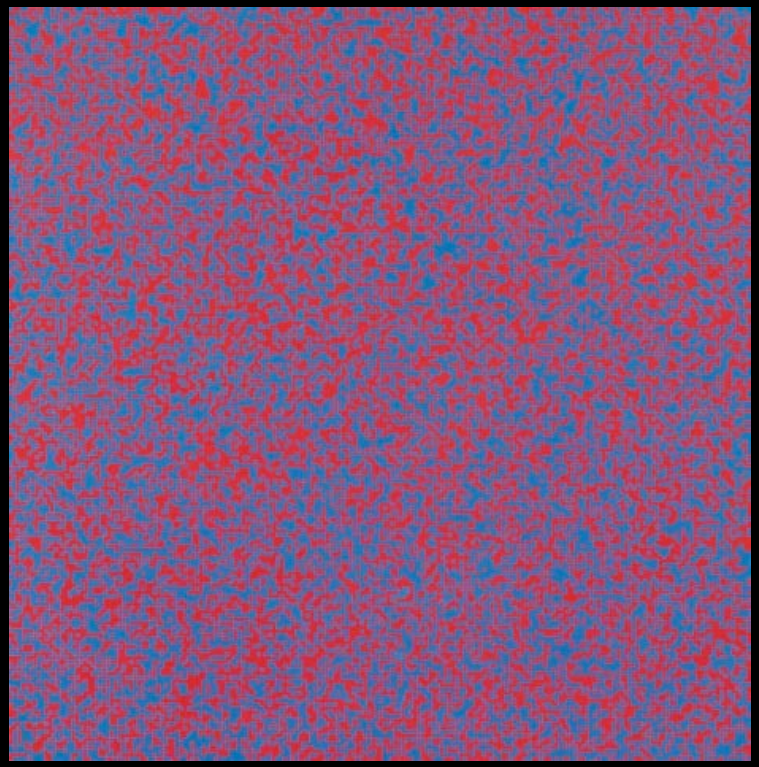
Gestalt

Perceptual Whole

Social Whole

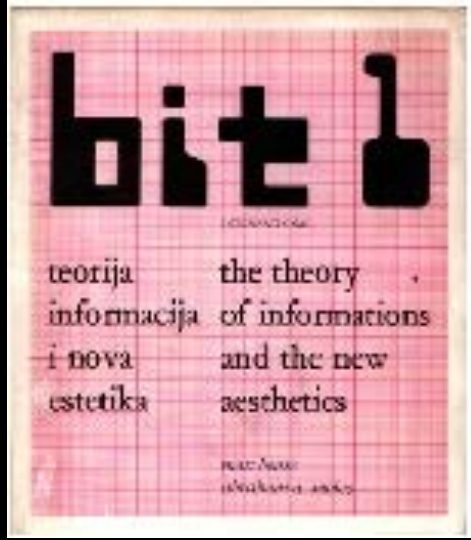
From Brain to Machine

From Wet to Dry



Left:
François Morellet,
Random Distribution of 40,000 Squares using the Odd and Even Numbers of a Telephone Directory,
1960, Oil on canvas

Below:
The *bit international* journal was published as part of the activities of the *New Tendencies* movement. The objective of the editors was: “to present information theory, exact aesthetics, design, mass media, visual communication, and related subjects, and to be an instrument of international cooperation”. The title, *bit international* (or only *bit*) refers to the basic unit of information storage and communication (as introduced by Claude E. Shannon). It is short for “binary digit”, a term that has been used in the field of computing and telecommunications since the late 1940s. From 1968 to 1972, the Galerije grada Zagreba [Galleries of the City of Zagreb] published nine issues of the magazine (bit international 5/6 and 8/9 were double issues). [http://dada.compart-bremen.de/item/publication/326]



Nouvelle Tendance/New Tendency: (Neo)Constructivism and Kinetic Art

Many followers of the NT [New Tendencies] have tried to give their work the habit of the machine or else they have based their procedures on the use of mechanical and electrical devices; they have all dreamt of machines – and now machines have arrived. And they have arrived from a direction which was somewhat unexpected, and accompanied by people who were neither painters nor sculptors.

-- Radoslav Putar, Art Critic, 1970

New Tendencies

Yugoslavian Art Scene

International Art Scene

1960s

Student writing:

The mediums chosen by NT artists are notably industrial. Did the political climate of Yugoslavia play into this rejection of traditional mediums?

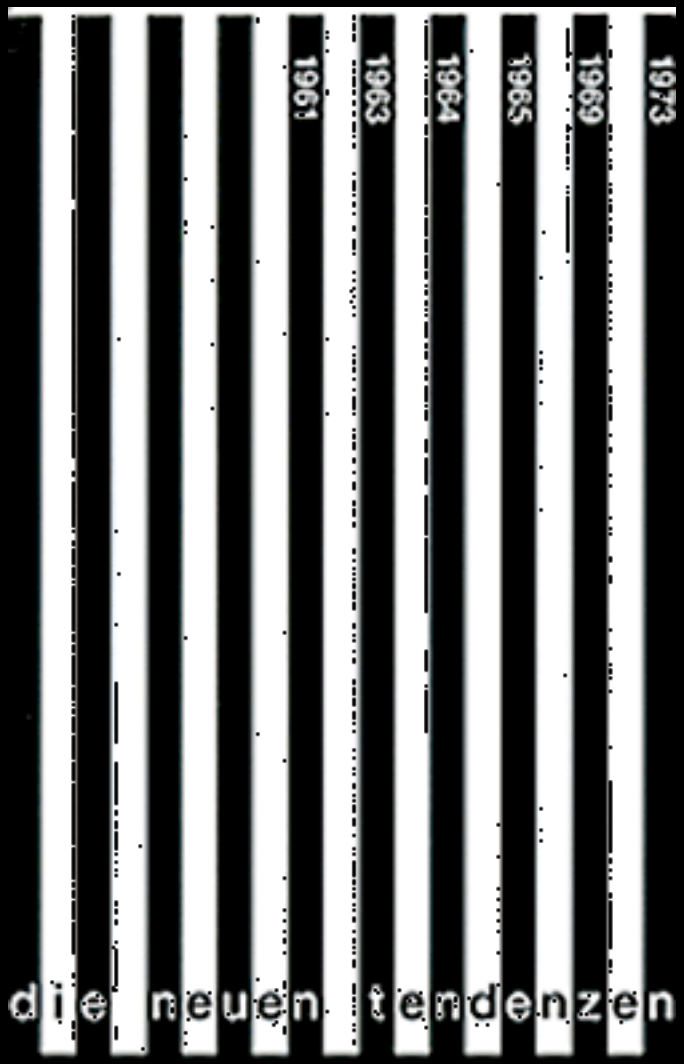
Student writing:

Are weapons used by the military considered works of art?

How can we understand the relationship between art and the military industrial complex within NT art?

Student writing:

Could the synthesis of art and technology be what is needed to broach the gap between left-wing and right-wing politics?

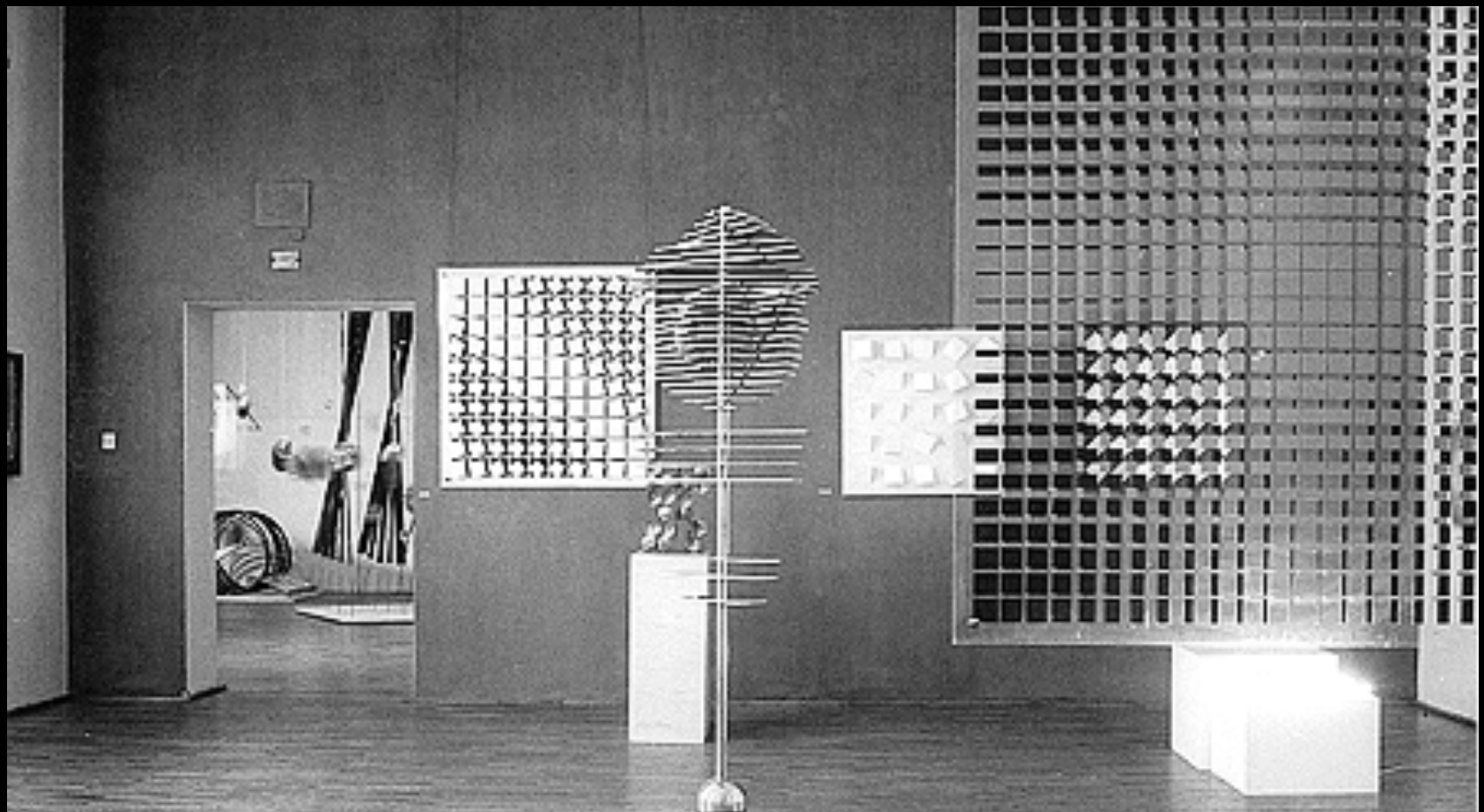

1973
1969
1965
1964
1963
1961
die neuen tendenzen

nove tendencije 2
galerija suvremene umjetnosti, zagreb, katarinin trg 2 1. august - 15. septembar 1963

New Tendencies Exhibitions:
1961
New Tendencies
1963
New Tendencies 2
1965
New Tendency 3
1968-1969
Tendencies 4 (1968-1969) Computers and Visual Research
1973
Tendencies 5 Section: Computer and Visual Research

New Tendencies Colloquia and Symposia:
1962
Meeting of the Nouvelle Tendance (New Tendency)
1965
Working Meeting of the Participants in NT3
1968-1969
New Tendencies 4 (1968-1969) Computers and Visual Research
1971
Art and Computers 71. Colloquium
1973
Tendencies 5 (1973), The Rational and Irrational in Visual Research Today. Symposium, Match of ideas
1978
Tendencies 6 (1978), Art and Society International Symposium

New Tendencies Publications:
bit international (Magazine)



Student writing:

Did New Tendencies inadvertently create a new elitist subgroup in their efforts to escape the art world?

Concrete Art
Asociacion Arte-Concreto-Invencion
Inventionist Manifesto
1946

The artistic age of representational fiction is coming to an end. Man is becoming less and less sensitive to illusory images. That is, he is becoming progressively more integrated in the world. The old phantasmagoria no longer meets the aesthetic needs of the new man, brought up in a society that demands his total, unreserved commitment…

Scientific aesthetics will replace the age-old speculative, idealistic aesthetics…

The physics of beauty are relevant now

In 1946 at the start of the concrete art movement in Argentina, the Manifesto invencionista (Inventionist Manifesto) was authored by artist Tomás Maldonado and published by the group Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención. Concrete Art is abstract art which is not based on any observed reality. Some of the artists were involved with the Argentinian movement, Perceptismo, which focused on abstract painting based on a mathematically formulated relationship between colors and geometric shapes. One of the key ingredients in their work was to place great importance on the context and environment in which the art was to be experienced visually.

Max Bill, Graphics, 1944/1960

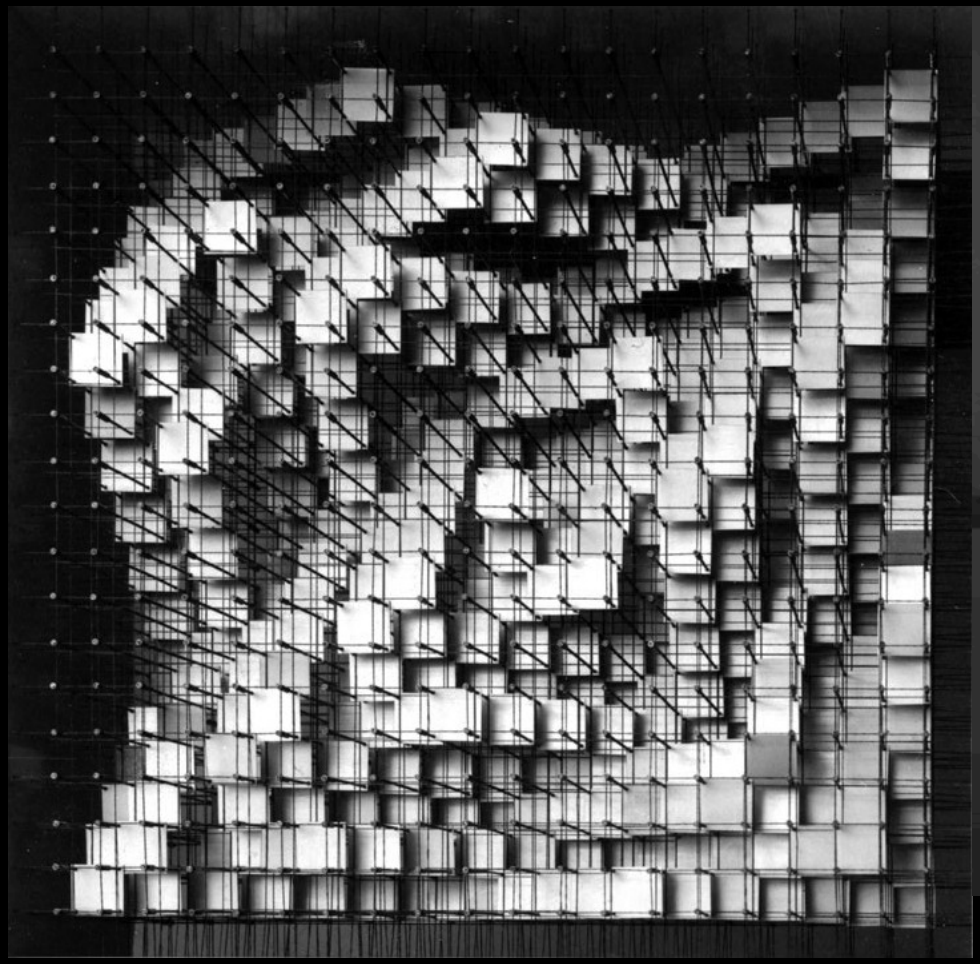
Max Bill, Continuity (Colossus of Frankfurt), 1986 – Made form 66 tons of granite, based on two parallel Möbius strips

The Mathematical Approach in Contemporary Art
Max Bill, 1949

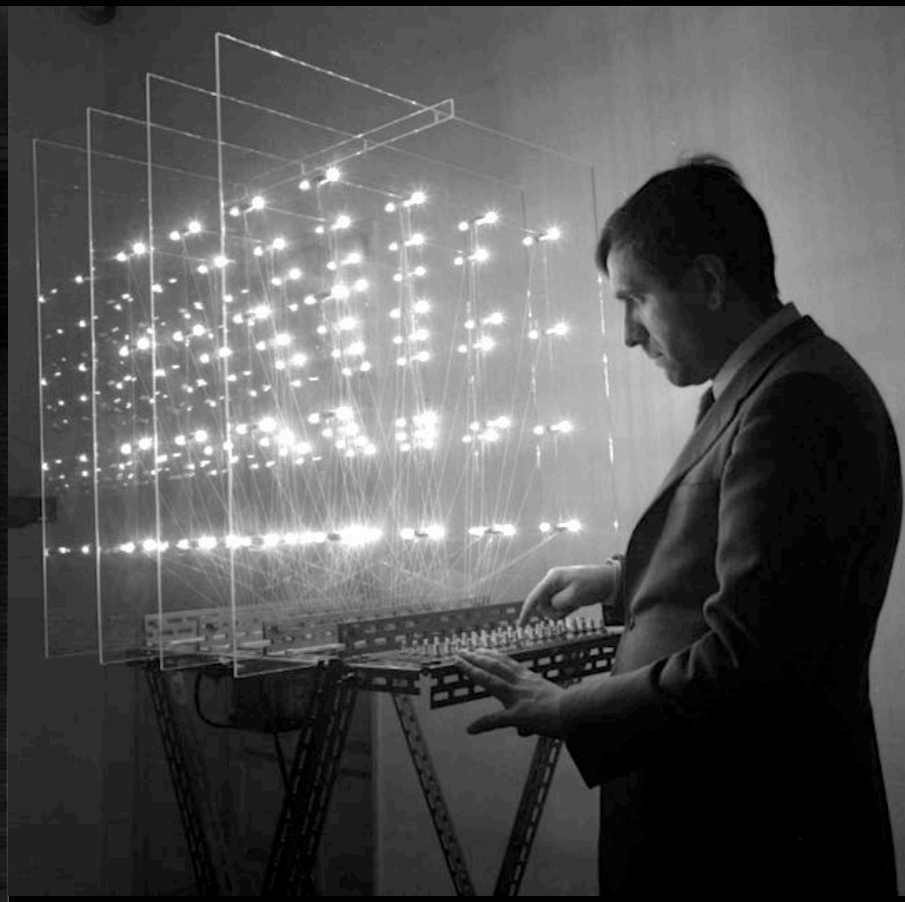
It must not be supposed that an art based upon the principles of mathematics, such as I have just adumbrated, is in any sense the same thing as a plastic or pictorial interpretation of the latter. Indeed, it employs virtually none of the resources implicit in the term "Pure Mathematics". The art in question can, perhaps, best be defined as the building up of significant patterns from the everchanging relations, rhythms and proportions of abstract forms, each one of which, having its own causalty, is tantamount to a law in itself. As such, it presents some analogy to mathematics itself where every fresh advance had its immaculate conception in the brain of one or other of the great pioneers, This Euclidian geometry no longer possesses more than a limited validity in modern science, and it has an equally restricted utility in modern art. The concept of a Finite Infinity offers yet another parallel. For this essential guide to the speculations of contemporary physicists has likewise become an essential factor in the thinking of contemporary artists. These, then, are the general lines on which art is daily creating new symbols: symbols that may have their source in antiquity but which meet the aesthetic-emotional needs of our time in a way hardly any other form of expression can hope to realize.

Student writing:

Where do we draw the line between art and science? Is drawing lines our way of dealing with and controlling the amorphous world around us?



Enzo Mari, Struttura 744, 1964. Anodized aluminium, brass and steel



Enzo Mari, Struttura 895, Omaggio a Fadat — shown at Milan's Galleria dell'Ariete Luce e movimento [Light and movement] exhibition, 1967

Umberto Eco, Opera aperta (translated into English as "The Open Work"), 1962
Eco's notion of "The Open Work" is an attempt to understand modern artworks which can be rendered open by their author, and further completed by the performer, viewer, reader or audience.

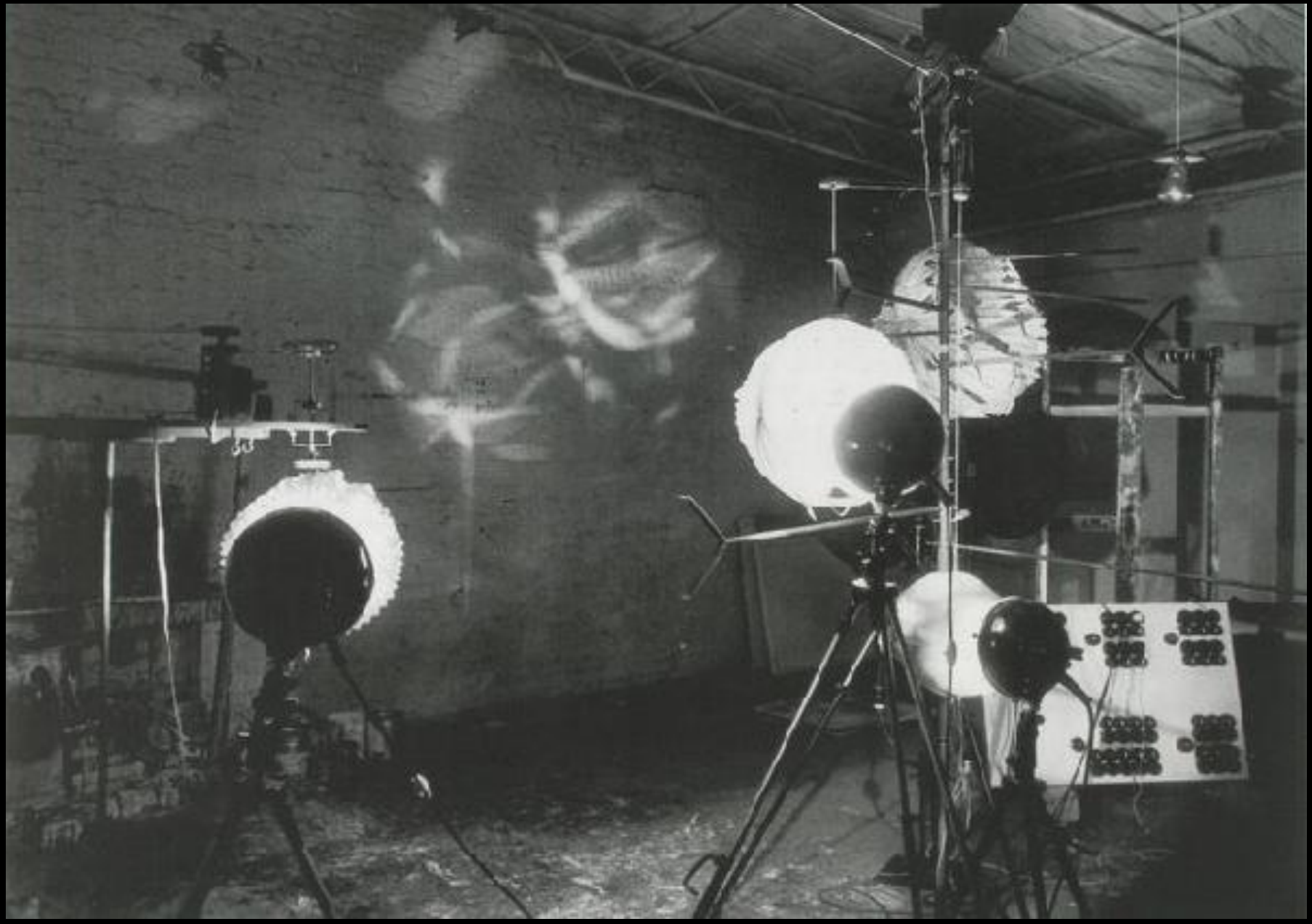
Nowadays, to say that a poetics of the "informal" is characteristic of contemporary painting involves a generalization. No longer limited to a critical category, the term "informal"' has come to designate a general tendency of our culture and to encompass, along with painters such as Wols and Bryen, the *tachistes,* the masters of *action painting, art brut, art autre,* and so on, at which point we might as well inscribe it under the broader rubric of *the poetics of the open work.*

"Informal art" is open in that it proposes a wider range of interpretive possibilities, a configuration of stimuli whose substantial indeterminacy allows for a number of possible readings, a "constellation" of elements that lend themselves to all sorts of reciprocal relationships. As such, "informal painting" is closely related to the open musical structures characteristic of post-Webem music and to a form of poetry which in Italy goes by the name of *novissima,* whose representatives have already agreed to define it as "informal."

Student writing:

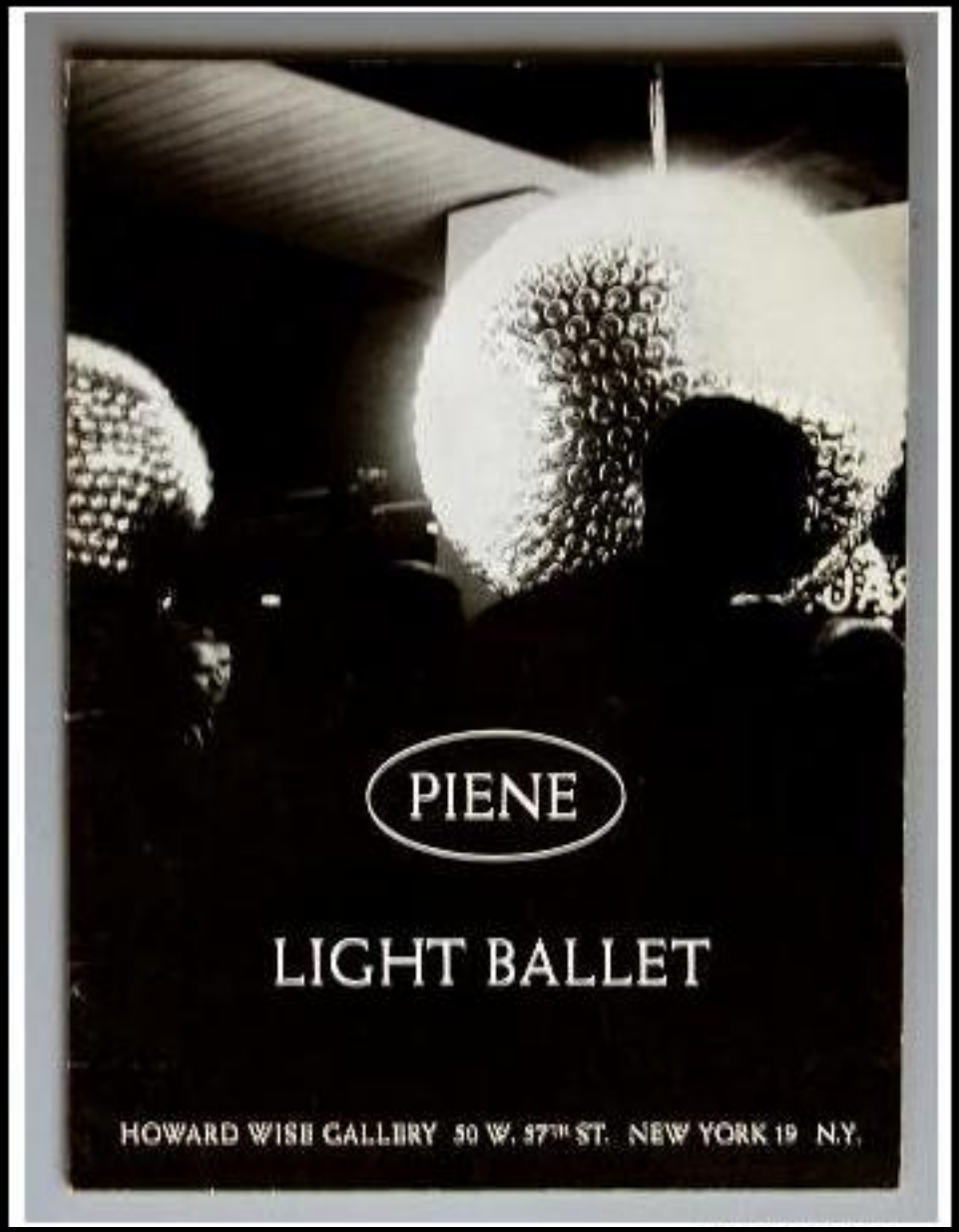
Does the removal of human caprice from NT works allow for them still to be considered art?

Zero Group



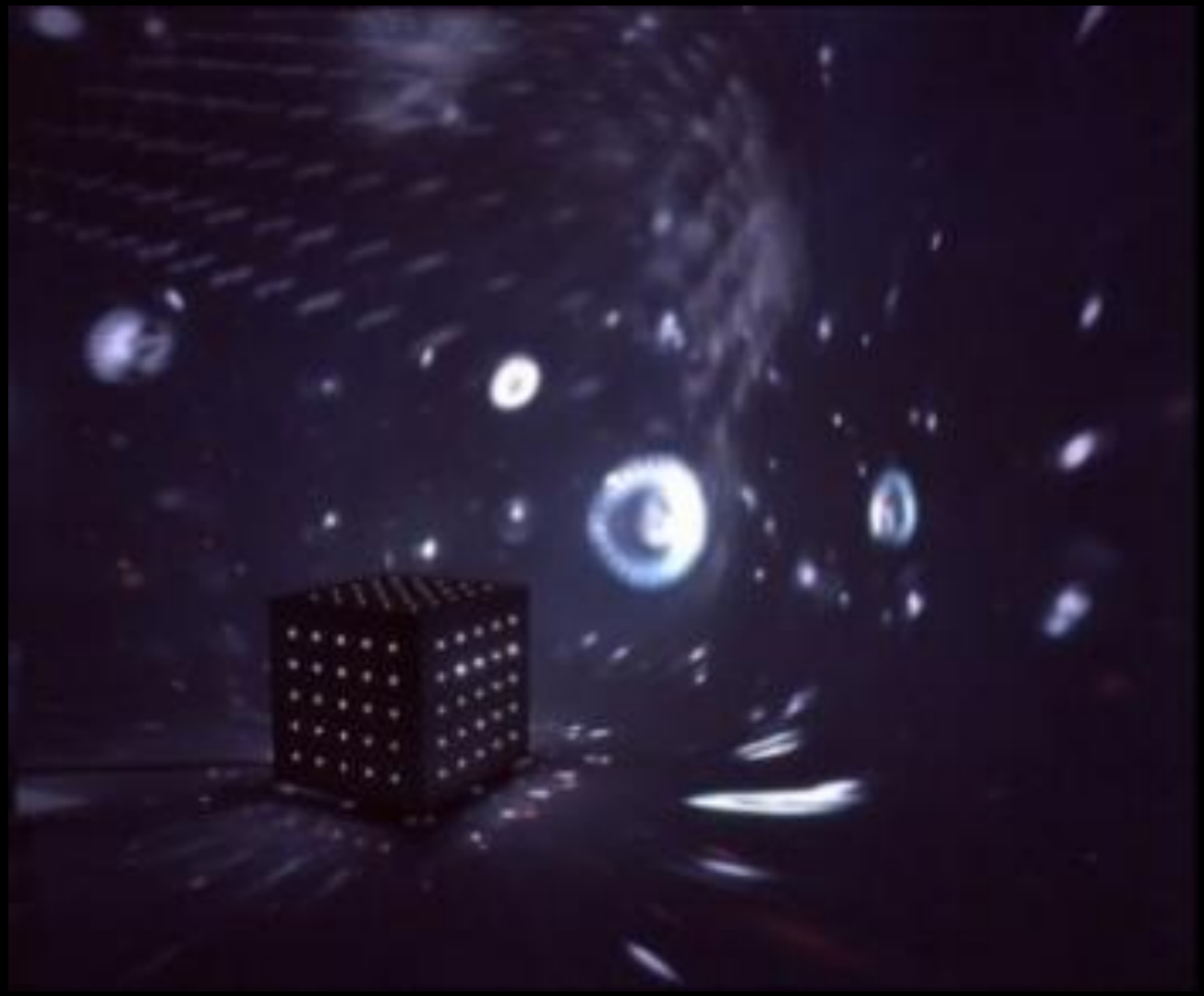
Otto Piene, Light Ballet, Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, 1959-61

Otto Piene, Electric Rose, 1965

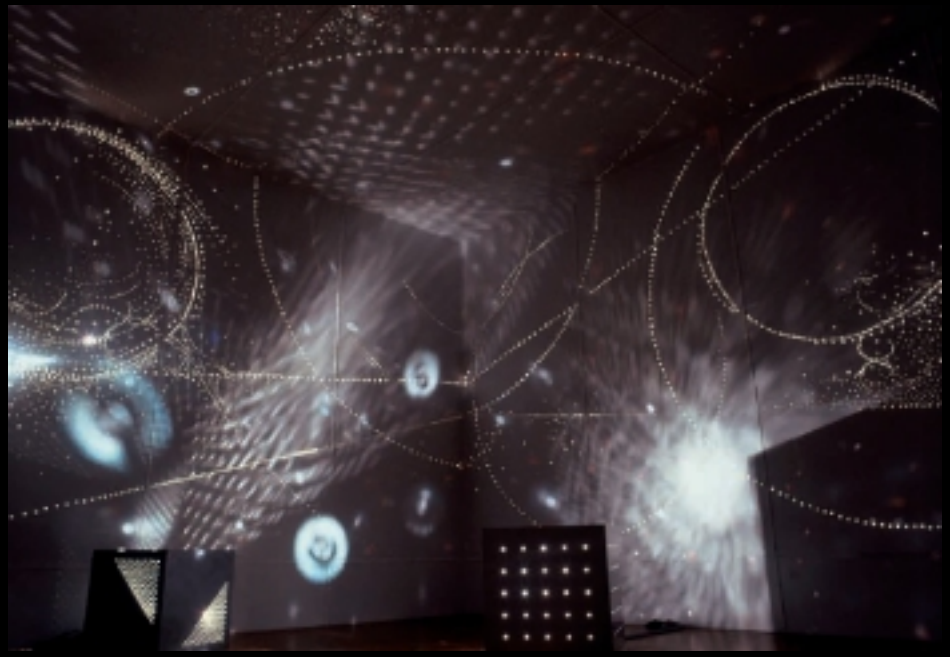


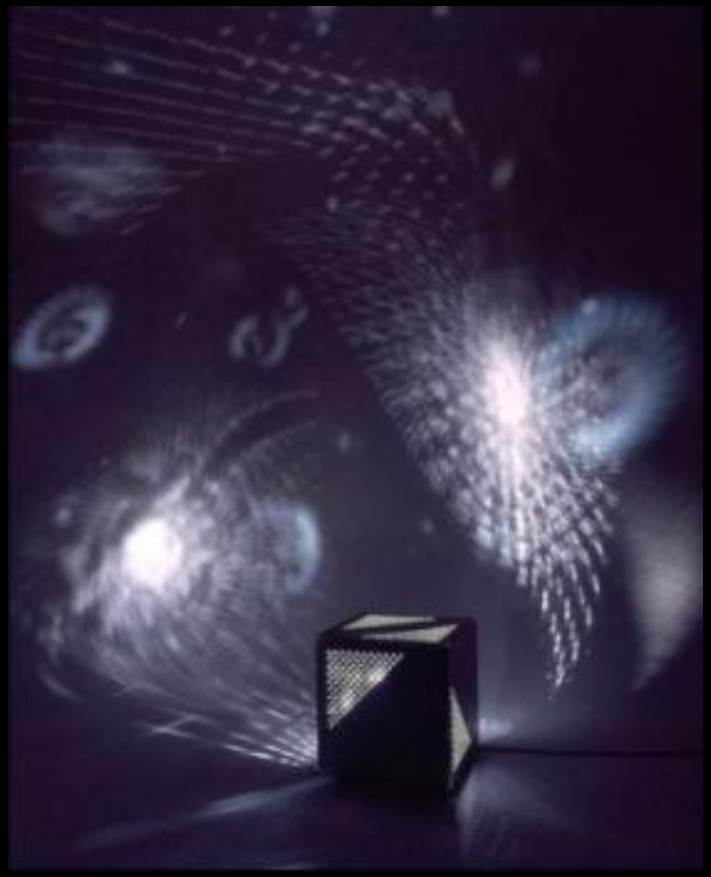
Student writing:

How does the avant-gardism of NT compare to other modes of avant-gardism within the history of art?



Otto Piene, Light Space, 1960



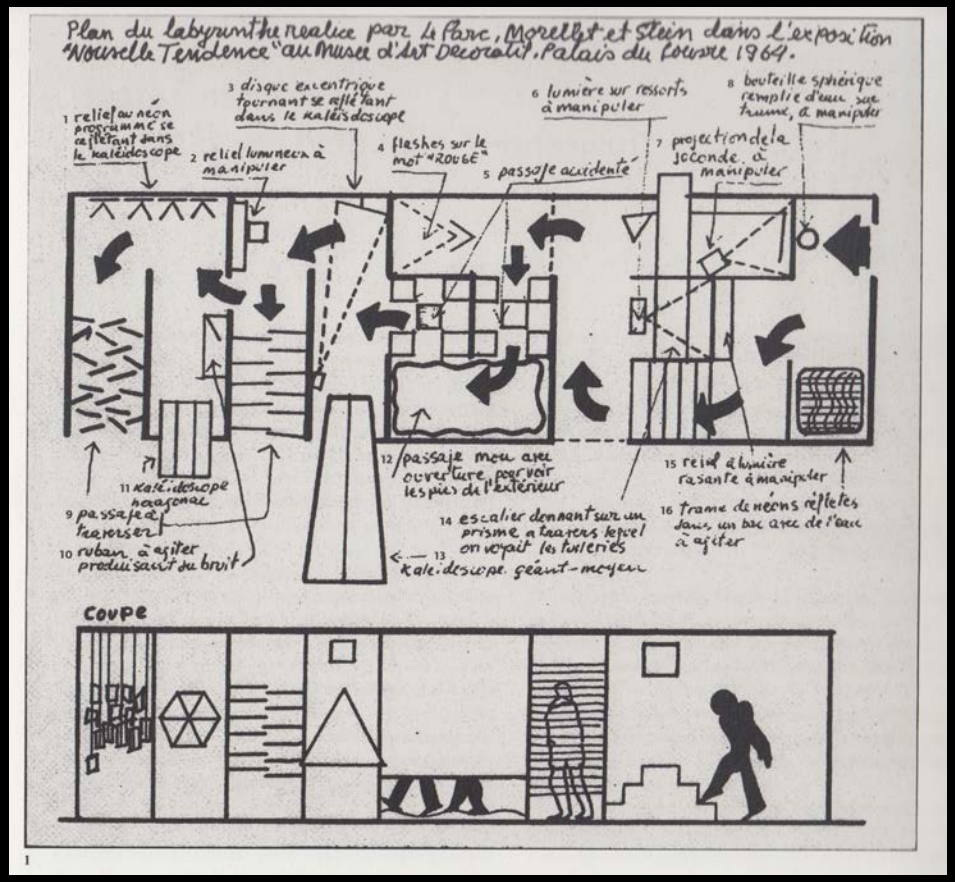


Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel [GRAV]
Assez des Mystification
(Enough Mystification), 1963

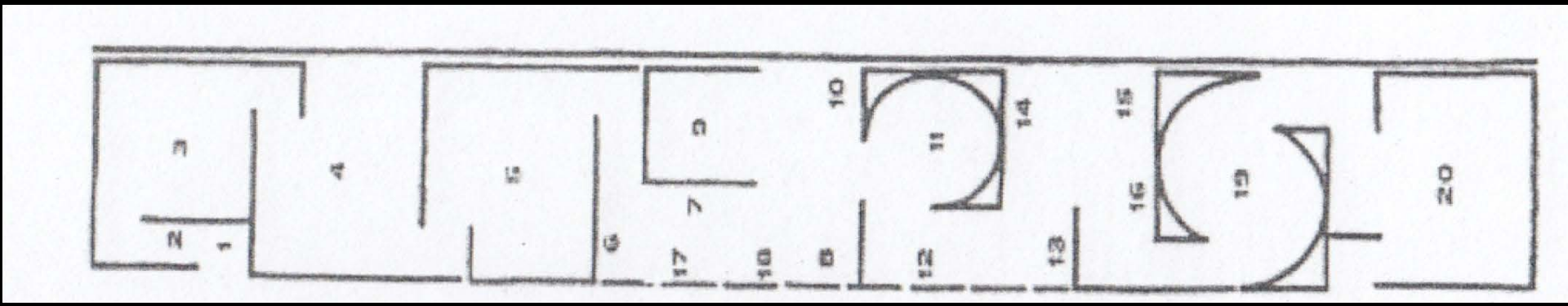
If there is a social preoccupation in today's art, then it must take into account this very social reality: the viewer.

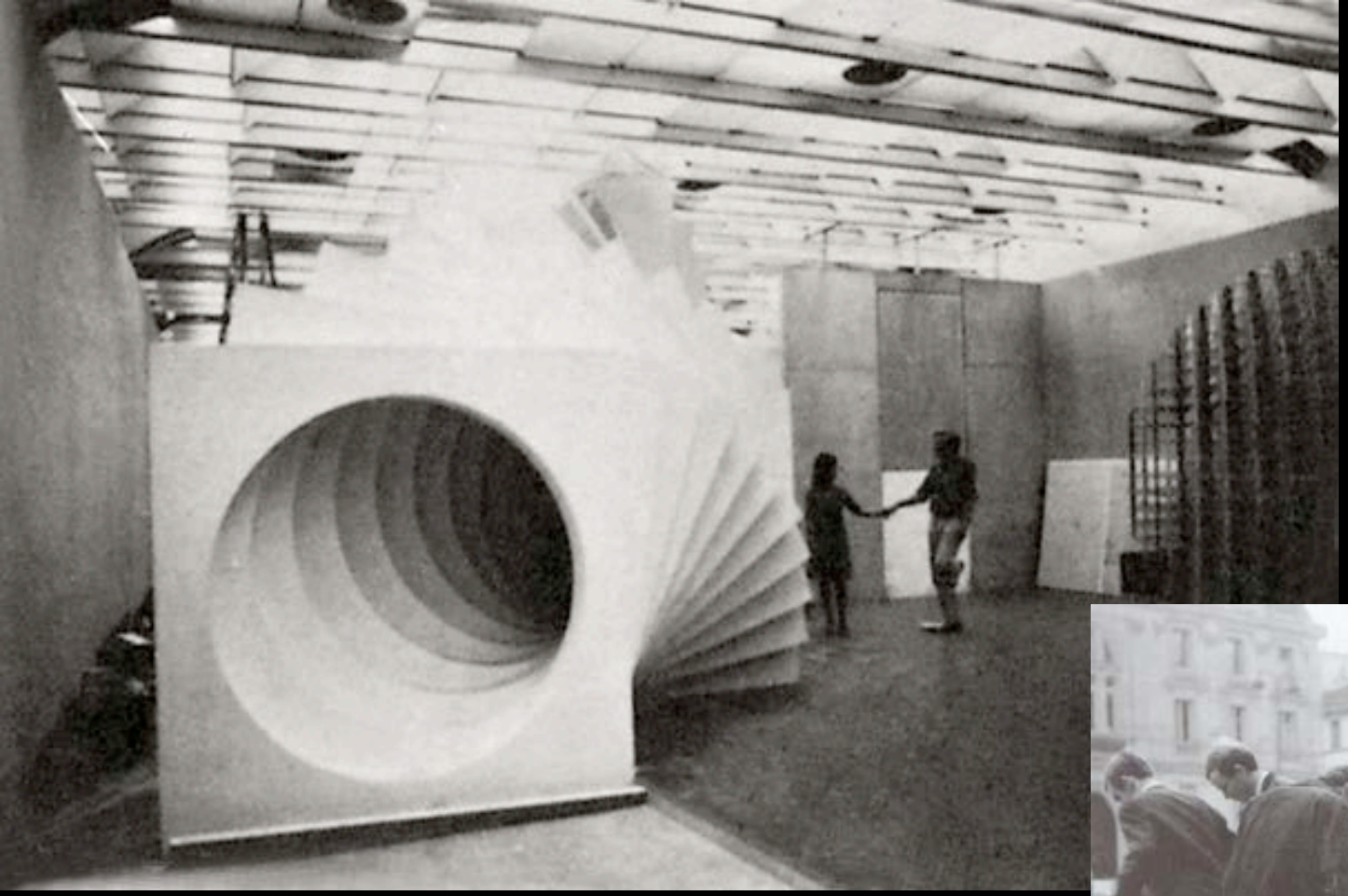
To the best of our abilities we want to free the viewers from this apathetic dependence that makes him passively accept, not only what one imposes on him as art, but a whole system of life... We want to make him participate. We want to place him in a situation that he triggers and transforms. We want him to be conscious of his participation...

A viewer conscious of his power of action, and tired of so many abuses and mystifications, will be able to make his own ‘revolution in art'.



Plan and diagram of Julio Le Parc with members of GRAV, "Labyrinthe," 1964-65. Left, plan at the Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris in the context of the 1963 Biennale de Paris, 1963. Below, diagram for New Tendency exhibition at the Musée d'Art Décoratif, Palais du Louvre, 1964





Above: GRAV, Paris Biennale, 1963 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3PH-u9Zsgo

Right: GRAV, Day in the Street, 1966On April 19, 1966

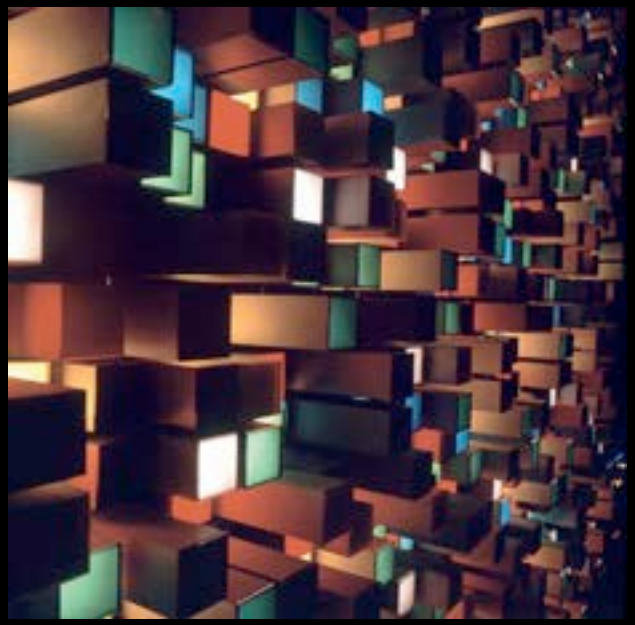
The Day in the Street itinerary unfolded in Paris where GRAV invited the passing public to involve themselves in various kinetic activities. The itinerary started 8 o'clock in the morning with the GRAV artists handing out small gifts to passengers at the entrance of the Châtelet Metro. At 10 am the public was invited to assemble and disassemble changeable structures on the Champs-Élysées. At midday habitable kinetic objects could be manipulated, and at 2pm a giant kaleidoscope was made available to passers by while balloons floated in the fountain. 6 pm passers by where invited to walk on moveable paving slabs at Montparnasse.

A NEW SYMBIOSIS WITH MACHINES, 1965–1969

The crisis culminated in 1965. In August, after the opening of *Nova tendencija 3* in Zagreb, the participants met at Brezovica Castle near Zagreb to discuss the state of New Tendencies. They debated whether the concept of "art as research" as a way to overcome traditional modes of artistic creation was actually viable and whether new modes of production and distribution could resist the demands of the art market for unique originals and promotable stars. One of the speakers at the meeting was Abraham A. Moles, professor at Strasbourg University, who had in 1958 published his *Théorie de l'information et perception esthétique* (Information theory and aesthetic perception), an early work on information aesthetics. Though a discussion of the computer did not enter the minutes of the meeting,[10] it was presumably Moles who inspired the integration of the computer into the project of "visual research" in 1968. In his article "Cybernétique et œuvre d'art" (Cybernetics and the work of art), published in the *Nova tendencija 3* catalogue, Moles emphasized that society had to take the technological transformation of the human condition by information-processing machines seriously: they "are discretely conquering our world, that is to say, the world of our thoughts."[11]

How is the computer a mode of political and economic resistance for the New Tendencies artists?

In summary, the optimistic embrace of computing technology in 1967 by the Croatian organizers of *Tendencije 4* must be seen as a reaction to the crisis within the movement that culminated in 1965. Some of the central aims of the movement seemed to remain unattainable: to demystify the concept of art and artistic creation by a substantially rational approach that denied romanticism and subjectivism; to overcome individualism by collective work; to make art accessible to all social classes by applying industrial principles of reproduction; and to unmask the dominating influence of the art market. The strong forces of art commerce in Western Europe, in particular, appeared to undermine any radical change.[15] For these artists and theorists, the computer appeared as a manifestation of hope descending from the purified world of distant laboratories, untainted by art commerce and fashion. The computer was seen as a means to push artistic research beyond insidious aesthetic traditions and to resist the art market's rules.



Vladimir Bonacic, GFE (16, 4), 1969-71

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qw764twB0CM

New Tendencies published nine issues of a multilingual magazine called *Bit International*

In 1968 the Zagreb-based NT decided to incorporate into its program the computer as a medium of artistic work so as to thereby assert its avant-garde claim and to contribute to the definition of a technology which, as one quite rightly presumed, would define the future of civilization. NT initially sought to consciously accompany and form the historical transition in which the computer was perceived as medium of artistic creation. They set computer generated works in relation to Constructive and Kinetic Art (1968/69) and to Concept Art (1973). The arts of the electronic media were not considered as an isolated phenomenon but rather incorporated into the history and discourse of fine-and performing arts.

From 1968 to 1972, the Galerije grada Zagreba [Galleries of the City of Zagreb] published nine issues of the magazine (bit international 5/6 and 8/9 were double issues).

Op Art

MoMA, William C. Seitz

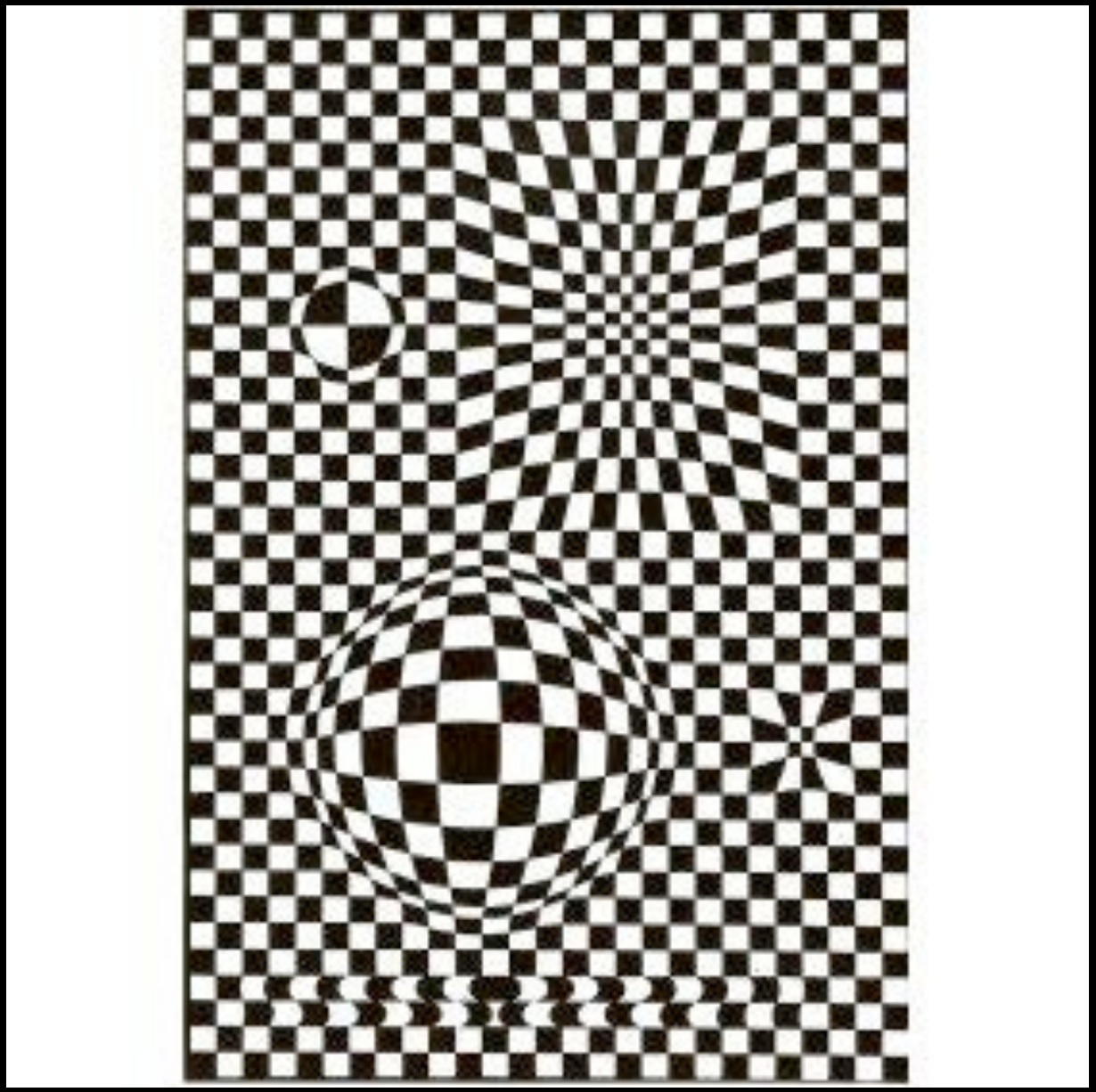
February 1965

Director of Documentary:
Brian De Palma

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxgqN2Gf-Do

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaUme6DY8Lk

Victor Vasarely



Victor Vasarely, Vega, 1957

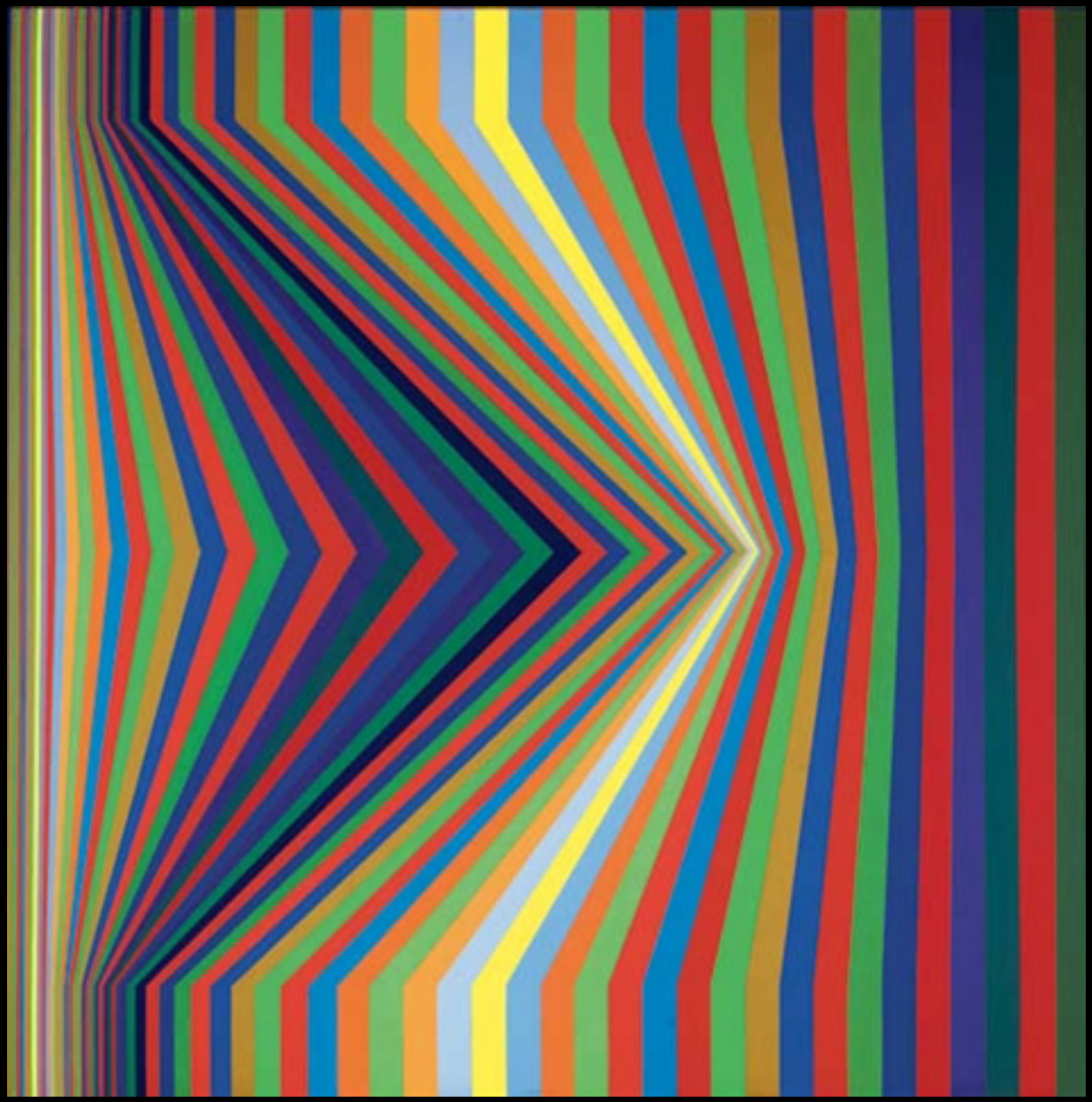
Student writing:

Why does Rosen describe Op Art as a Pyrrhic Victory?

[What is a Pyrrhic Victory?]

Are the objectives of NT still relevant in the digital age?

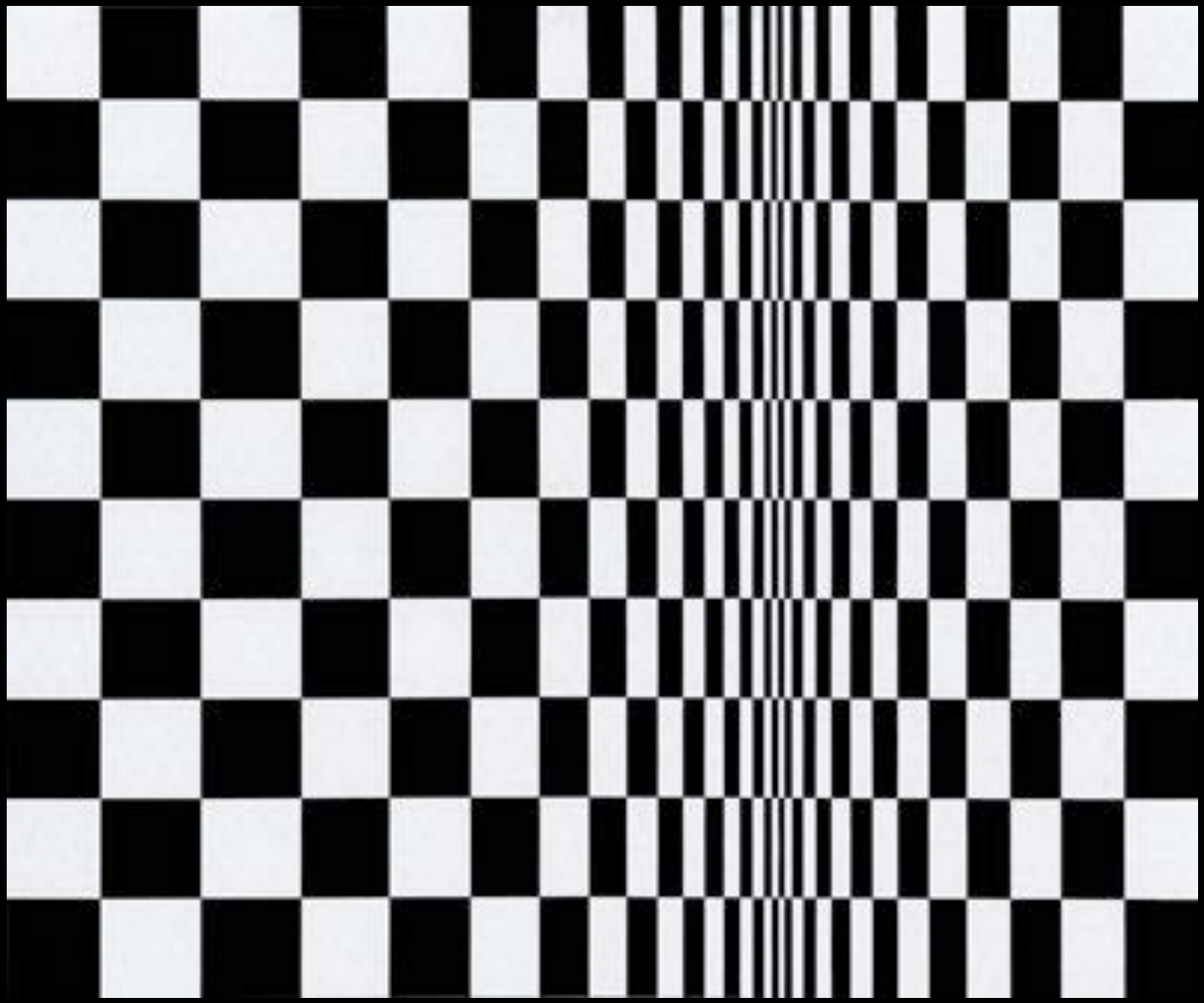
A Pyrrhic victory is a victory that inflicts such a devastating toll on the victor that it is tantamount to defeat. Someone who wins a Pyrrhic victory has been victorious in some way, though the heavy toll negates a true sense of achievement or profit.



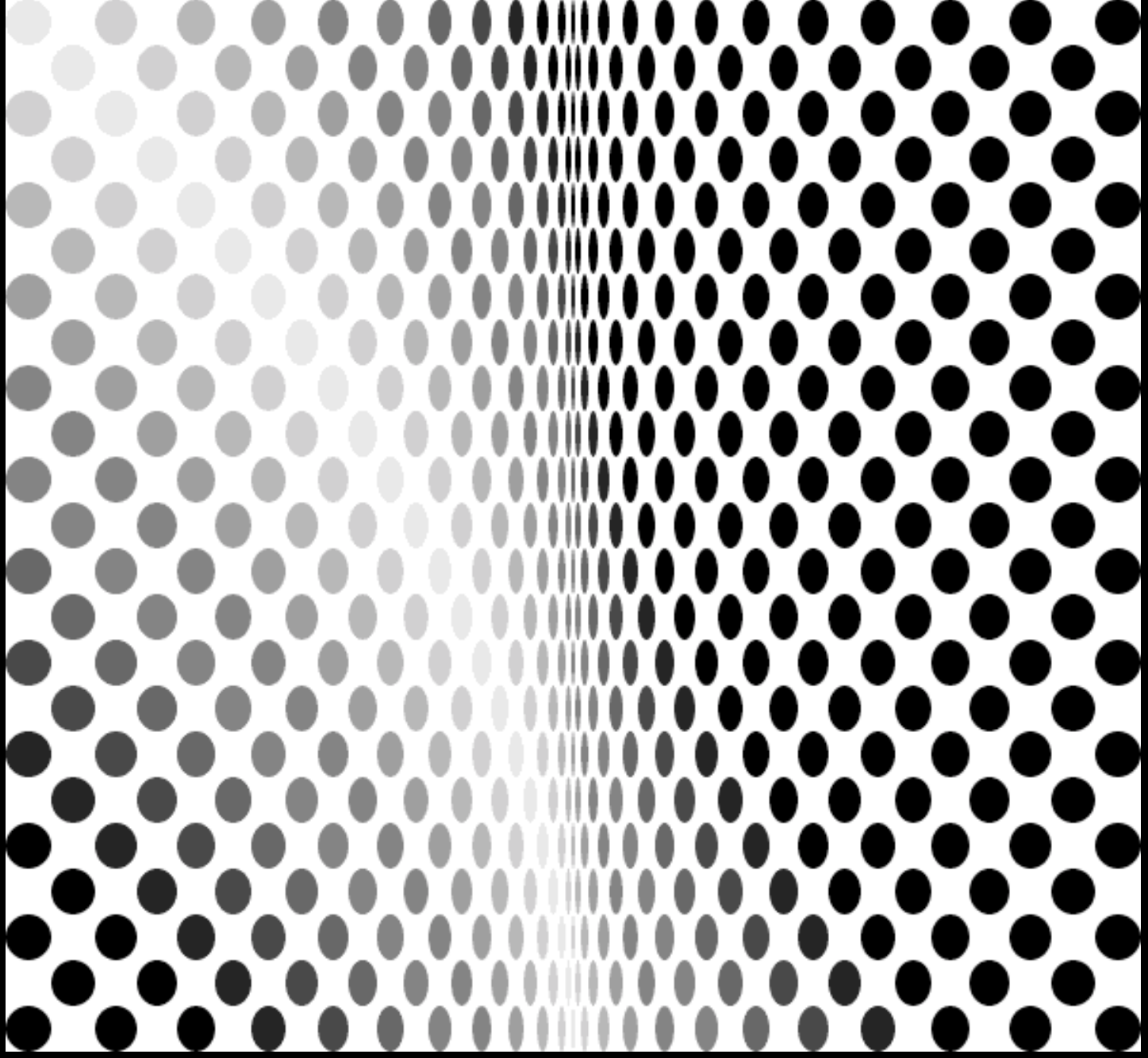
Victor Vasarely, *Berc*, 1967

Vasarely, Kroa A, 1968

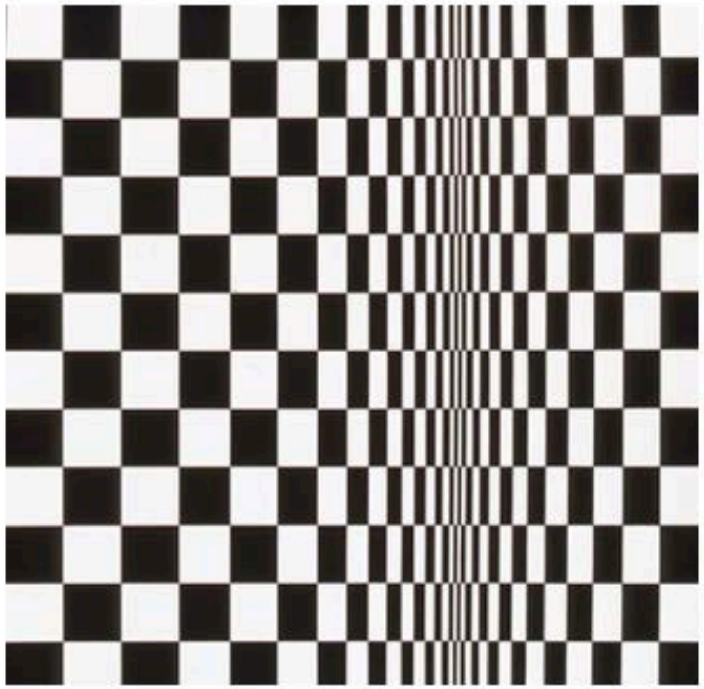
Bridget Riley (b. 1931-)



Bridget Riley, Movement in Squares, 1961



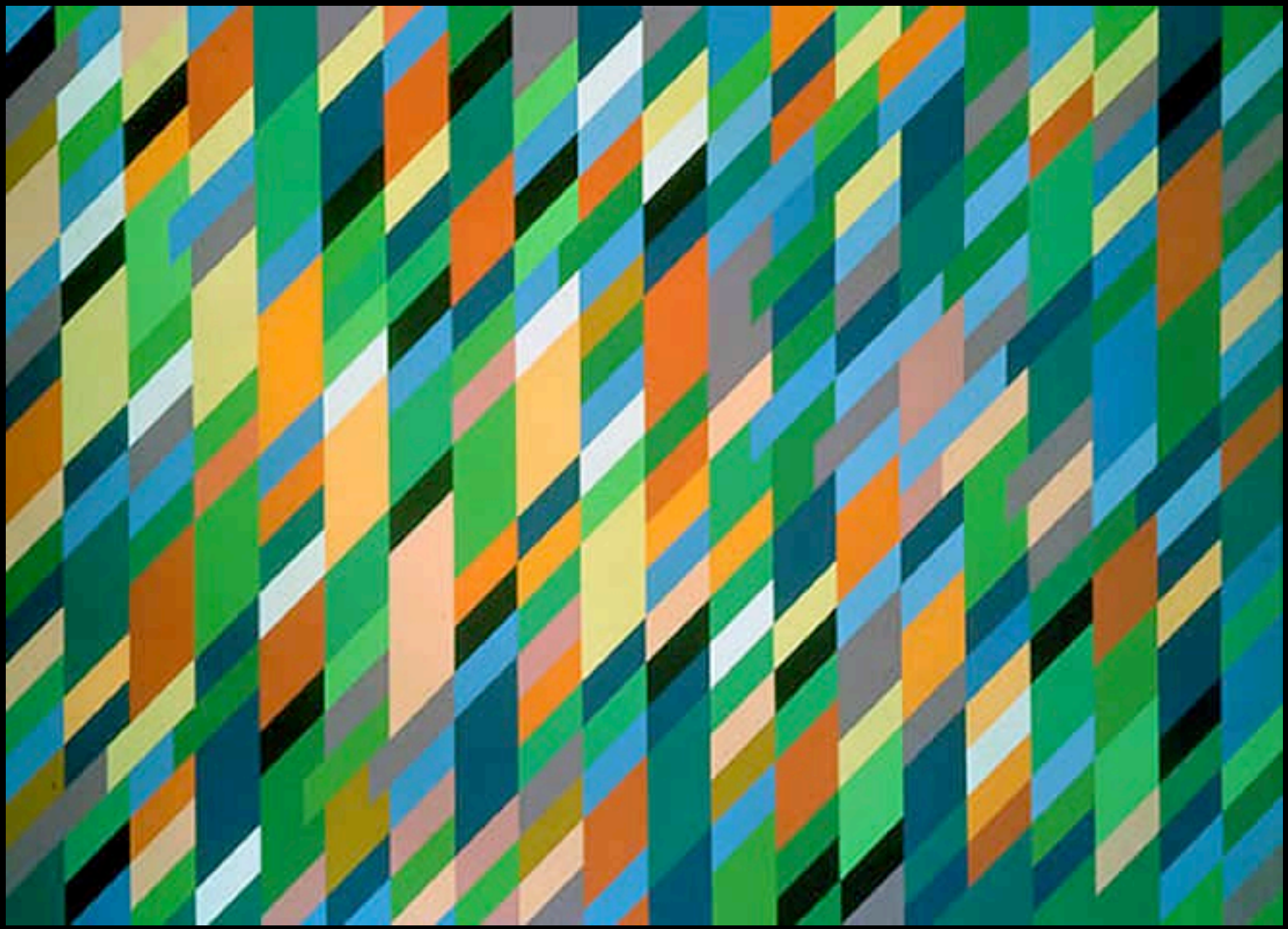
Bridget Riley, Loss, 1964



Left: Bridget Riley, Movement in Squares, 1961 and André Courrèges dress, 1965

Right: Pierre Cardin collection, 1969

Bridget Riley, Aurulum, 1978



Bridget Riley, *High Sky 2,* 1992