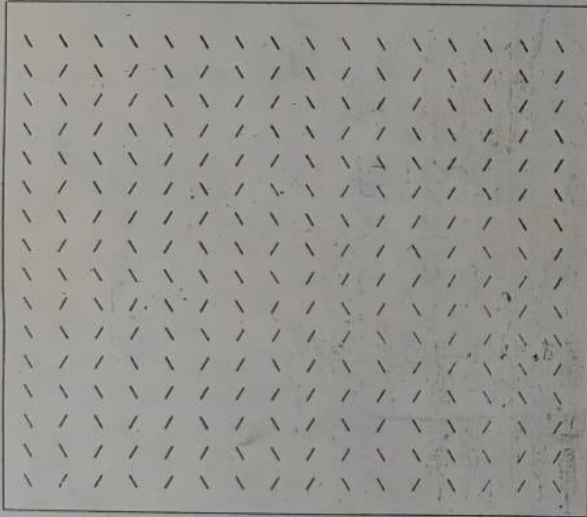




Hadamard Matrix for Ralston Farina, 1986, George Chaikin.

At the recent series of lectures entitled "The Dematerialization Of Art," held by New York University, Mr. Chaikin was asked by this editor to explain why the above illustration was art. His response is the following. He is an instructor at Cooper Union in Computer Graphics, Image Processing, and Machine Vision. —D. Daniels

Why It's Art

BY GEORGE M. CHAIKIN

I've been asked to tell you why it's art. I'd like to say it's art because I made it to be art, and leave it at that, but while that appeals to my ego, it doesn't respond to your genuine inquiry. Obviously, in some sense, it has failed as a work of

art since it has not made its qualities self-evident. I do not wish it to be obvious, but I certainly do not wish it to be obscurantist. I wish to invite, even demand, examination, and that it reveal itself as examination proceeds, that this revelation be open ended, that it yield up more and more as examination grows deeper. I've said it failed in some respects, but it has also succeeded: For me, it continues to hold fascination, to reveal new sides of itself.

It's art because it's a drawing of an idea. The bimodality of the diagonals represent an effort to express the underlying duality of the elements in a form which gives equal weight to each mode. Other attempts using black and white, horizontal and vertical, plus and minus, or zero and one, failed in this respect. While this represents the best realization to date, I'm still working on new possibilities. I find these diagonals too dry, too ascetic. (This is not typical of my drawings, which are usually rich in curves.) I'd like to find a curvilinear realization which suitably expresses the idea.

It's art because it's magic. It has a secret name, the knowledge of which gives the possessor exalted powers, power over nature. Its secret name is its algorithm, which reveals itself to the careful observer. Therefore...

It's art because it knows its own name. Since it knows its own name, it possesses magical powers, specifically the power of self-replication. This means it may even come close to being alive.

It's art because it is recursive. I'll bet you never heard this one before, but I'm sure you've encountered the concept. It means that the drawing contains its own reiteration at a different scale—this is fundamental to its algorithm—that it is defined in terms of itself on a different scale.

It's art because it's reflective. Reflection is an extremely powerful action. Reflect upon it. The recursive algorithm involves three identical copies and one inversion. Both of these are reflective operations.

It's art because I give it away. I give it away because it is an idea, because that's a function of art, to give ideas. The versions I have given away so far have been too sparse, too thin. I hope soon to do one of these drawings containing more than one million lines, to make a million copies of it and give them away. That's a trillion lines.

It's art because it was done in memory of Ralston Farina.

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