Beyond the Image:

Rules, Co-creation and Creative Intention

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Written work

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Overview

At the beginning of Unit 2, my question was: *when designers relinquish direct control over the visual outcome, how do the rules they set drive participants' behaviour and generate graphics?* Moving between the roles of rule-maker and executor, I found that the more important question was not whether rules can generate form — they clearly can — but *what happens to the author's creative intention once form has been generated.*

I understand creative intention as the relationships a creator builds between visual elements and hopes the work will convey. It does not reach the reader directly; it travels through three interrelated carriers: the interactive mechanism that organises participants' behaviour, the text-image arrangement that establishes relationships between elements, and the reading process that guides how meaning forms. My research question therefore became: *How is creative intention preserved, understood and changed as it is passed on? And what happens to it when multiple participants intervene?*

In graphic and communication design, designers usually ensure that a message is conveyed accurately by controlling the final image: which images to use, where to place them and what the reader sees first are all decided by the designer. But in a growing number of art and co-creation practices, the designer no longer completes an image; instead, they build a system for others to complete — a set of game rules handed to an audience, a participatory workshop, or a web page where strangers write in turn. In these situations, the final image no longer comes from the designer's hand, and authorship moves with it, from the image into rules, interfaces and modes of participation. *Designers therefore need a clearer understanding of where authorship goes, what it still shapes after the image has been handed over, and what responsibilities come with sharing it.*

In what follows, I first review the process of my Unit 2 projects to show how the research question took shape step by step. I then place these projects within their historical and contemporary contexts and analyse the four cases that influenced me most. Finally, I return to the original question to consider what designers can still shape through rules, arrangement and reading after handing over the image, and what they must leave to others.

My Unit 2 research went through three stages, each moving the question one step further.

1. *Graphic Maze* and *Dot_t.*:
Can Rules Generate Graphics?

My first two projects formed my initial research position. In *Graphic Maze*, I set rules that translate behaviour into graphics, so that participants generate images by walking through a maze (Fig. 1). Even when participants do not know the author's intention, their behaviour is still guided by the preset rules. The second project, *Dot_t.*, combines a phrase-chain game with a connect-the-dots game: each participant must first interpret the words left by the previous person and then respond (Fig. 2). Unlike *Graphic Maze*, here participants' interpretations directly shaped what came next, and the final result could not be simply predicted. *These two projects showed me that giving up direct control over the image does not mean that authorship disappears; the designer's judgement remains in how rules, interfaces and modes of participation are set.* At this point, however, I still saw designer and participant as two relatively separate roles. I was concerned with who controls the work, and had not yet asked what rules can actually convey, or which parts always remain beyond control.

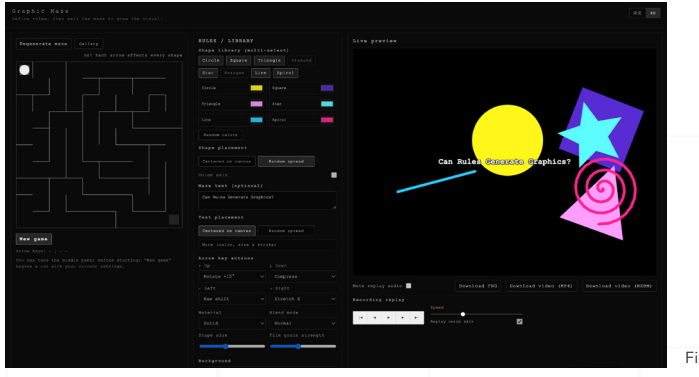


Fig. 1. Graphic Maze, website screenshot

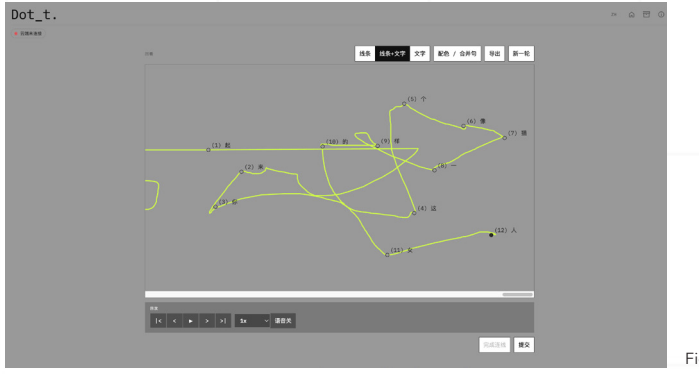


Fig. 2. Dot_t., website screenshot

My Unit 2 research went through three stages, each moving the question one step further.

2. Δ1 *The Twenty-Fifth Room*:
Rules Decide Elements, the Author Builds Relationships

In the Δ1 illustrated narrative project *The Twenty-Fifth Room*, my role shifted from rule-maker to executor. Borrowing the constrained-writing method of Georges Perec's *Life A User's Manual*, I built a narrative framework from a five-by-five grid, a knight's tour[1] and an element allocation table, assigning five mandatory elements to each chapter, and then wrote and illustrated within these constraints (Figs 3 and 4).
Working through this process, *I found that rules can decide whether elements appear, but cannot fully determine what they mean in the narrative and the image.* The same elements could be organised into different plots, or produce new interpretations through different visual relationships. This finding led me to rethink the relationship between rules and personal creative intention.

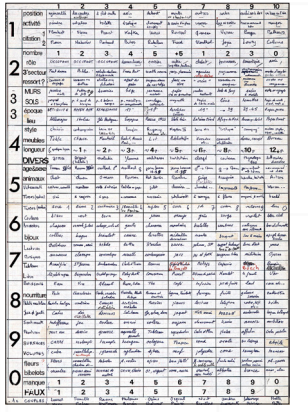


Fig. 3.
Georges Perec, *Life A User's Manual*: the grid of constraints



CHAPTER ELEMENT MATRIX

25 chapters · 5 categories · original grid arrangement

	1	2	3	4	5
1	**Chapter 1** Object: Clock Animal: Cat Colour: Yellow Reading: Daily Newspaper Game: Playing Cards	**Chapter 12** Object: Lamp Animal: Bird Colour: Sky Blue Reading: Art Book Game: Spinning Top	**Chapter 25** Object: Mirror Animal: Spider Colour: Green Reading: Novel Game: Jigsaw Puzzle	**Chapter 18** Object: Telephone Animal: Dog Colour: Purple Reading: Technical Report Game: Chess	**Chapter 3** Object: Box Animal: Fish Colour: Red Reading: Letter Game: Dice
2	**Chapter 22** Object: Lamp Animal: Dog Colour: Green Reading: Novel Game: Dice	**Chapter 17** Object: Mirror Animal: Fish Colour: Purple Reading: Technical Report Game: Playing Cards	**Chapter 2** Object: Telephone Animal: Cat Colour: Red Reading: Letter Game: Spinning Top	**Chapter 13** Object: Box Animal: Bird Colour: Yellow Reading: Daily Newspaper Game: Jigsaw Puzzle	**Chapter 24** Object: Clock Animal: Spider Colour: Sky Blue Reading: Art Book Game: Chess
3	**Chapter 11** Object: Mirror Animal: Bird Colour: Sky Blue Reading: Letter Game: Chess	**Chapter 8** Object: Telephone Animal: Spider Colour: Green Reading: Daily Newspaper Game: Dice	**Chapter 23** Object: Box Animal: Dog Colour: Purple Reading: Art Book Game: Playing Cards	**Chapter 4** Object: Clock Animal: Fish Colour: Red Reading: Novel Game: Spinning Top	**Chapter 19** Object: Lamp Animal: Cat Colour: Yellow Reading: Technical Report Game: Jigsaw Puzzle
4	**Chapter 16** Object: Telephone Animal: Fish Colour: Red Reading: Art Book Game: Jigsaw Puzzle	**Chapter 21** Object: Box Animal: Cat Colour: Yellow Reading: Novel Game: Chess	**Chapter 6** Object: Clock Animal: Bird Colour: Sky Blue Reading: Technical Report Game: Dice	**Chapter 9** Object: Lamp Animal: Spider Colour: Green Reading: Letter Game: Playing Cards	**Chapter 14** Object: Mirror Animal: Dog Colour: Purple Reading: Daily Newspaper Game: Spinning Top
5	**Chapter 7** Object: Box Animal: Spider Colour: Purple Reading: Technical Report Game: Spinning Top	**Chapter 10** Object: Clock Animal: Dog Colour: Red Reading: Letter Game: Jigsaw Puzzle	**Chapter 15** Object: Lamp Animal: Fish Colour: Yellow Reading: Daily Newspaper Game: Chess	**Chapter 20** Object: Mirror Animal: Cat Colour: Sky Blue Reading: Art Book Game: Dice	**Chapter 5** Object: Telephone Animal: Bird Colour: Green Reading: Novel Game: Playing Cards

Fig. 4.
The Twenty-Fifth Room: table of chapter elements

3. Δ2 The Space of Rules:
One Rule, Different Forms

In the Δ2 writing study *The Space of Rules*, I returned to the ideas of *Conditional Design*. Whereas Δ1 focused on element allocation and creative outcomes, *Conditional Design*'s emphasis on process turned my attention to how rules vary in execution. I began to ask: *when the same rules are expressed in different forms, how does what is communicated differ?* To explore this, I rearranged *The Twenty-Fifth Room*, presenting each chapter in four forms: condition words, illustration, novel, and a one-sentence summary combined with illustration. These four forms represent four communicative relationships: condition words show the constraints of the rules themselves; illustration gives the rules a visual form while leaving the relationships between elements open; the novel fixes the relationships between the condition words through narrative; and the one-sentence summary with illustration makes both the imagery and the relationships clearly visible. Roland Barthes's discussion of the polysemy of the image offered a theoretical lens for these differences, and made me realise that *creative intention lies not only in content itself, but is continually constructed through how information is organised and the order in which it is read.*

I then invited twenty-five readers, without reading the novel, to write their own stories from the illustrations alone, to test how much of the author's intention the images themselves could carry. Most kept the relationships visible in the images but wrote different plots; quite a few, drawing on their own experiences, also produced imagery close to that of my novel.

Looking back on these three stages, I found that *the author's creative intention is not always copied intact as it is passed on, nor does it disappear entirely when participants intervene.*
The interactive mechanism preserves the behavioural conditions of the author's intention but cannot predetermine participants' choices; the text-image arrangement establishes visible relationships between elements but cannot fix the meaning behind them; and text and the reading process further guide interpretation, making some meanings explicit while leaving others open. The author's original intention is continually transformed through these stages rather than persisting in its original form. This finding did not arise in isolation; I now place it within a wider historical and contemporary context.

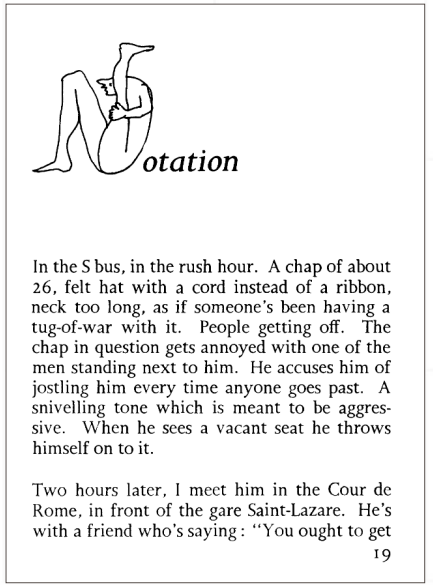
Replacing direct design with rules is not a new idea. From Queneau's constrained writing and Gerstner's design programmes to Conditional Design, this way of making has continued for more than half a century. Meanwhile, literary theory has long asked whether the meaning of a work is decided by its author or produced by its reader. Today, participatory creation also exists in a new environment: social media, crowdsourcing platforms and generative AI have turned participation into labour and data, so that who can take part, who is credited and who owns the work have become questions of social justice. Below, I follow these three threads (the tradition of rules, the relationship between author and reader, and the cost of participation) to set out the historical and contemporary contexts of my research, and to show where my work sits within them.

1. The Tradition of Rules

In 1947, in *Exercises in Style*, Queneau retold a minor incident on a bus ninety-nine times in ninety-nine different ways (Fig. 5). The content barely changes; what changes is the rule, and each rule makes the story appear differently. This book first made me realise that difference can come from rules themselves.

The Oulipo, which Queneau later co-founded, developed constrained writing into a systematic method, and Perec's *Life A User's Manual* is its most complex example (Fig. 6) — the method I borrowed in Δ1.

Fig. 5. Raymond Queneau, *Exercises in Style*, page 10.



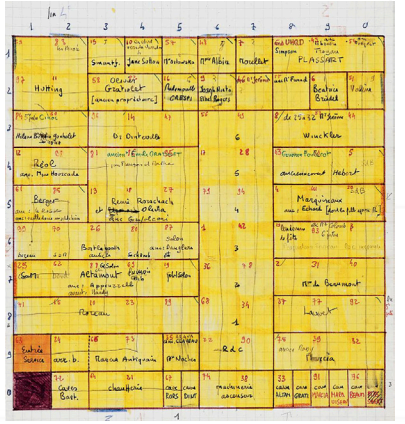
otation

In the S bus, in the rush hour. A chap of about 26, felt hat with a cord instead of a ribbon, neck too long, as if someone's been having a tug-of-war with it. People getting off. The chap in question gets annoyed with one of the men standing next to him. He accuses him of jostling him every time anyone goes past. A snivelling tone which is meant to be aggressive. When he sees a vacant seat he throws himself on to it.

Two hours later, I meet him in the Cour de Rome, in front of the gare Saint-Lazare. He's with a friend who's saying: "You ought to get

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Fig. 6. Georges Perec, *Life A User's Manual*



The same idea appears in the visual field. In *On Weaving*, Anni Albers argues that the grid and the warp and weft of the loom are not limits on form but the conditions that make form possible. In *Designing Programmes*, Karl Gerstner brought this thinking into graphic design: designers should design a programme rather than a fixed solution. The difficulty, he suggests, lies in balancing constants and variables: with too many constants the results are uniform; with too few, only noise remains.

This was exactly the problem I met in the first version of *Graphic Maze*. Participants used the arrow keys to move through the maze, and each step stretched, compressed, split or rotated six basic shapes on screen. But because the six shapes were fixed, the results of different routes looked very similar (Fig. 7). In the second version, I let participants choose the shapes, colours and key functions before entering the maze, turning constants into variables.

Rules were later handed even further into others' hands. The American conceptual artist Sol LeWitt's wall drawings were often just a set of written instructions carried out by assistants; I return to his ideas in the case studies. The digital artist Casey Reas first writes rules in words for how shapes move and meet, then turns them into code so that software generates the images Conditional Design gathers a group of people around the same sheet of paper to draw in turn according to rules (Fig. 8). *Graphic Maze* and *Dot_t.* developed along this line.

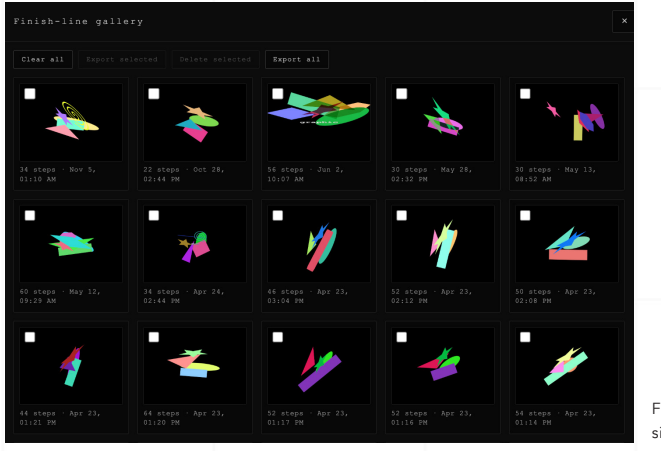


Fig. 7. Graphic Maze,
similar images generated by different routes.

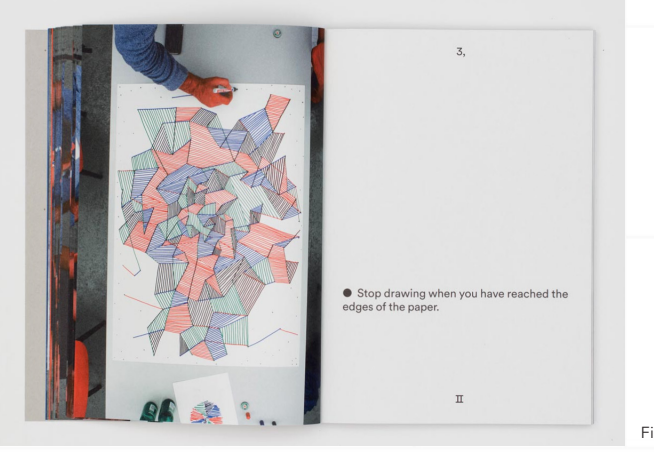


Fig. 8. Conditional Design

2. From Author to Reader

Rule-based creation focuses on how form is generated, but rarely discusses how work is read. Roland Barthes approached the problem from the other end. In *The Death of the Author*, he argues that meaning is not decided by the author but produced in the reader. This supported my initial assumption that participants can produce meaning even without knowing my intention. Yet in *Rhetoric of the Image*, Barthes shows that text can 'anchor' an image, guiding the reader towards a meaning chosen in advance. The tension between these two essays is the problem I would later face in *The Twenty-Fifth Room*: to what extent can a designer guide the reader?

Since 1993, Hans Ulrich Obrist's do it has handed instructions written by artists to people around the world to carry out. It showed me that participation need not happen in real-time interaction; understanding and carrying out a piece of text is itself a form of participation. This gave me grounds for later inviting readers to write stories from my illustrations.



Fig. 9. Studio Moniker, *Do Not Touch*, 2013

3. The Cost of Participation

However, the environment in which rule-based creation exists today is entirely different from when it began. Social media depends on user-generated content, crowdsourcing platforms break human judgement into micro-tasks priced in cents, and every view and click is recorded as data. Participation is no longer only an artistic method; it has also become an economic resource.

Aaron Koblin's *The Sheep Market* (2006) exposes this clearly. On Amazon Mechanical Turk, he paid anonymous workers two cents per drawing, collected ten thousand drawings and later sold them under the artist's name . The work shows that 'inviting others to take part' is not inherently equal; it can also be a way of acquiring cheap labour. I discuss its method and form in the case studies.

Studio Moniker's *Do Not Touch* (2013) reveals another cost of participation. Viewers move their cursors following on-screen text prompts, and everyone's cursors are combined into a constantly changing collective image (Fig. 9). It is the work closest in structure to *Dot_t.*, but in its image each person's trace is lost in the crowd. This led me to do the opposite: to keep every participant's trace in *Graphic Maze* and *Dot_t*.

These works forced me to face questions of fairness in my own projects. The paths participants leave in *Graphic Maze,* the sentences they write in *Dot_t.*, and the stories readers write from my illustrations are all their labour and creation. Who owns these traces? Should they be credited? Do participants know their actions are being recorded? Spencer Chang's *we were online* lets people browsing Wikipedia see and follow each other's cursors, making the question of informed consent concrete. When selling his website artworks, Rafaël Rozendaal requires collectors to keep the work permanently public, offering another model of ownership in which the owner is more a guardian than an exclusive possessor.

Fairness also concerns who can take part. In conversation with the artist and educator Jazmin Morris, she introduced her project Sandbox, which combines physical and online exhibitions, workshops and a growing archive, valuing community, education and accessible tools over technical perfection . She asked me why my digital interactions always ended up as printed matter (Fig. 10). Only then did I realise that choosing which traces to print is itself an act of editing: I handed over control in the interaction and took it back in the publication. *Her question shifted my research from 'has the designer given up control?' to more concrete questions: who can take part, what does the system record, whose actions are seen, and who is left out?*

Language also affects who can take part. I work between Chinese and English, read Perec in Chinese translation, and made Chinese and English versions of *Dot_t.* Barthes also notes that how people understand an image depends on the cultural knowledge they bring to it. A system that seems open to everyone may still favour those familiar with its language and culture.

AI makes these questions more urgent. After testing an AI-generated app and finding it generic, Raphaël Bastide made *Carecore* by hand, deliberately choosing an 'un-promptable' direction. Generative tools absorb countless people's work into a single person's output, arguably repeating the structure of *The Sheep Market* on a far larger scale.



Fig. 10. Folded publication of a Chinese-language Dot_t. sentence chain

4. Positioning My Research

All three threads move the author away from the final image and let rules, readers or participants complete the work, yet each sees only one side of the problem. The tradition of rules is concerned with how form is generated, but seldom with whether what the author wants to say can be understood; for abstract graphics this matters little, but once rules are used to tell a story, whether readers can follow it becomes central. Barthes discusses how readers make sense of an image, but he analyses a finished advertisement, whose readers do not go on to create. Discussions of participation focus on labour, credit and fairness, but rarely ask how much of the designer's intention is left once others have taken part. Moreover, most existing participatory works deal with abstract graphics or collective images; few involve text-image narrative, and few consider how readers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds understand the same images.

My research sits within these gaps. From the tradition of rules, I take its methods: organising generation through constants and variables, writing rules as instructions others can carry out, and making the process visible through replay. From Barthes, I take a way of looking at how the arrangement of text and image guides reading. And I bring the questions raised by participation into the design of the rules themselves: who can take part, who is seen and who owns the work. *On this basis, I ask: in a participatory text-image work, how is the designer's intention conveyed, preserved and changed, and how can participants' contributions be made visible?*

The four cases below relate most closely to my research, each corresponding to a different stage in how creative intention is passed on. Conditional Design's *Workbook* and LeWitt's *Sentences on Conceptual Art* concern rules: the first showed me how to write ideas as rules others can carry out; the second made me realise that even without drawing, my intention still lies within the rules. Koblin's *The Sheep Market* concerns participation, showing how a precise rule can make each participant's difference visible. Barthes's *The Death of the Author* and *Rhetoric of the Image* concern reading, leading me to ask who really decides meaning when readers face my images and text.

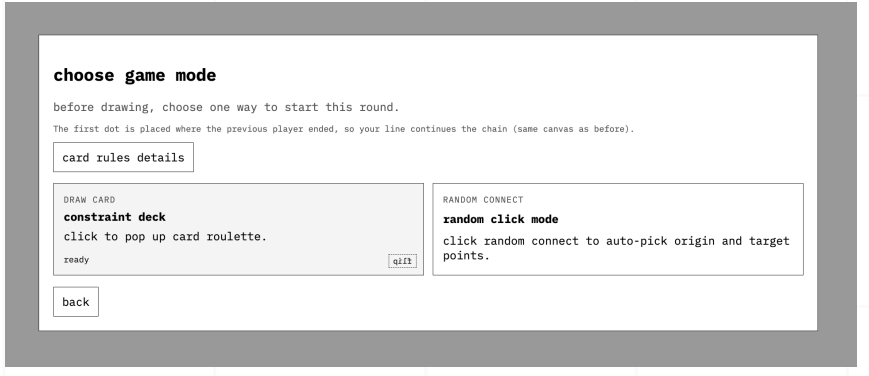


Fig. 11. Dot_t.: constraint cards, connecting interface and chain mode

1. Conditional Design *Workbook*: A Book That Can Be Executed

The core position of Conditional Design is that designers no longer decide the image directly but set clear rules, letting the work emerge through execution — hence 'the process is the product' (Maurer et al., no date). *The Workbook* builds this position into the layout of the book itself (Blauvelt et al., 2013). Each exercise opens with a short set of conditions stating the number of people, materials, duration and rules, which readers can carry out directly; what follows is not a finished work but a series of photographs recording the same sheet of paper at different stages. Many exercises also ask several people to draw in turn, so that the image grows gradually among participants. What readers take from the book is not a final image but a set of conditions that can be executed again and again.

Dot_t. borrows two of these practices: participants first draw a card bearing a rule, then connect the dots according to it; in chain mode, the next participant continues from the sentence and lines left by the previous one (Fig. 11).

In my Δ2 analysis, however, I also saw its limitation: Conditional Design attends to how a process unfolds, but does not discuss what the result communicates to readers. For abstract line exercises this is not a problem; for a story it is. At the end of *The Twenty-Fifth Room*, the allocation table required the mirror and the jigsaw puzzle to appear in the same chapter, but did not specify how they relate. It was I who decided that the missing puzzle piece would become a mirror, so that the daughter sees her own face as she completes her father's puzzle, bringing the novel's narrative to a close (Fig. 12). *Rules decide whether elements are present; the relationships between them must be built by the creator. Whether readers can understand those relationships became the question my later experiment set out to answer.*

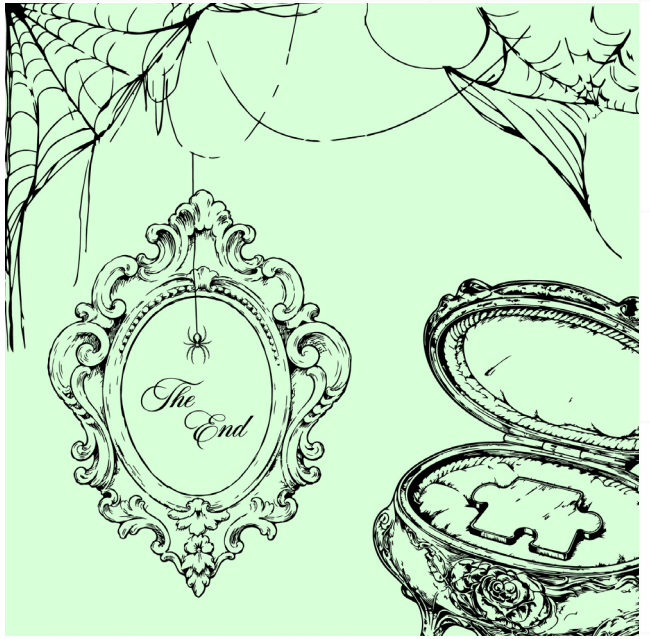


Fig. 12. The Twenty-Fifth Room, final chapter illustration

2. LeWitt, *Sentences on Conceptual Art*: The Author in the Rules

LeWitt's influence on me lies not in method but in exposing one of my blind spots. *Sentences* consists of thirty-five numbered statements, with no argument and no images; each reads like an instruction. The reader is not persuaded but told. The text is itself a set of rules, and what it says is precisely that the idea is the core of art, that execution can be carried out 'blindly' in a set way, and that the artist's will is secondary to the process he initiates (LeWitt, 1999, pp. 106–107). The structure of *Dot_t.* is similar: I write the rules, and participants follow them to connect the dots that words have become.

While developing *Dot_t.*, I kept trying to make the system more 'neutral': constraint cards could be skipped, connections could be random, and every word became a dot on equal terms. But I gradually found that every concession of control over the image came with a deeper intervention: I wrote the fifteen rules on the constraint cards, and I designed the 'random' mode. I had assumed that hiding the rules meant withdrawing; LeWitt instead wrote his rules out in public and openly acknowledged that this is where the author stands. This made me realise that honesty in participatory design lies not in erasing authorship but in putting it on the table for participants to see.

3. Koblin, *The Sheep Market*: **One Rule, Ten Thousand Differences**

The method of *The Sheep Market* is extremely simple. Koblin gave a single instruction — 'draw a sheep facing to the left' — and sent it via Amazon Mechanical Turk to thousands of strangers. There was no example, no stylistic requirement and no criterion for judgement. The instruction seems casual but is in fact highly precise. 'Sheep' gives everyone a shared subject, 'facing to the left' fixes the direction, and a uniform drawing box limits size and tools. Almost every variable that might interfere with comparison is removed, leaving only each person's way of drawing. The result is ten thousand different sheep: some drawn carefully, some in a few strokes; some with curly fleece, some little more than a cloud.

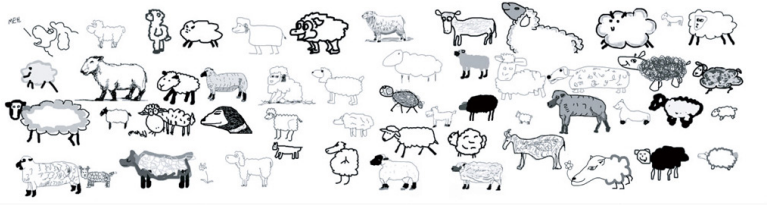
The way the work is presented makes these differences legible. Ten thousand sheep are arranged in a grid of identical cells, and the uniform conditions make every deviation obvious. On hover, each sheep is replayed stroke by stroke, so viewers can see where the drawer paused and where they corrected. A picture thus becomes a record of behaviour (Fig. 13).

This offered two direct lessons for my projects. First, the more precise the rule, the more legible the result — a principle I followed when redesigning the rules of *Graphic Maze*. Second, the process itself can become part of the work: *Graphic Maze* replays the pauses and accelerations of each walk, and *Dot_t.* saves each connection as a replayable process, both drawing on this approach.

4. Barthes, *The Death of the Author* and *Rhetoric of the Image*: **Where Intention Sits in Reading**

If the first three cases concern rules and participation, Barthes is what truly turned my research towards authorial intention. His two essays give seemingly opposite answers about the author. *The Death of the Author* is short and polemical: it starts from a sentence in a Balzac story, asks who is speaking, and ends by declaring that the birth of the reader must come at the cost of the author's death (Barthes, 1977a, p. 148). *Rhetoric of the Image*, by contrast, reads like a patient dissection: Barthes separates a Panzani pasta advertisement into linguistic and iconic messages, analysing layer by layer how the tomatoes, the string bag and the red, green and yellow palette together signify 'Italianicity'. He argues that the image is polysemous, carrying a 'floating chain' of signifieds (Barthes, 1977b, p. 39); text can act as 'anchorage', directing the reader towards a pre-selected meaning, or as 'relay', advancing the narrative together with the image (Barthes, 1977b, pp. 39–41). One essay announces the author's exit; the other shows in detail how the author guides the reader through arrangement.

Fig. 13. Aaron Koblin, The Sheep Market, 2006.



The tension between these two essays is what I wanted to test in Δ2. I presented each chapter of *The Twenty-Fifth Room* in four forms (Fig. 14):

a. Condition words
show the rules themselves, with no relationships between elements

b. Illustration only
gives elements concrete form, leaving their relationships open

c. Text only
fixes the relationships between condition words through narrative

d. One-sentence summary with illustration
uses text to anchor the image, making both the form of the elements and their relationships clearly visible.

I then invited twenty-five readers to write their own stories from the illustrations alone, without reading the novel. Most kept the spatial relationships visible in the images — the spider on the telephone wire, the newspaper under the chessboard — but wrote different plots and causes for them. Nearly half also wrote imagery of memory and absence close to that of my novel. *The results fall precisely between Barthes's two essays: the author's creative intention neither disappeared nor was fully anchored. Spatial relationships fixed by the image were preserved, the causal logic that existed only in the novel's text was rewritten, and similar themes may have come from readers' shared cultural experience, or simply from coincidence.*

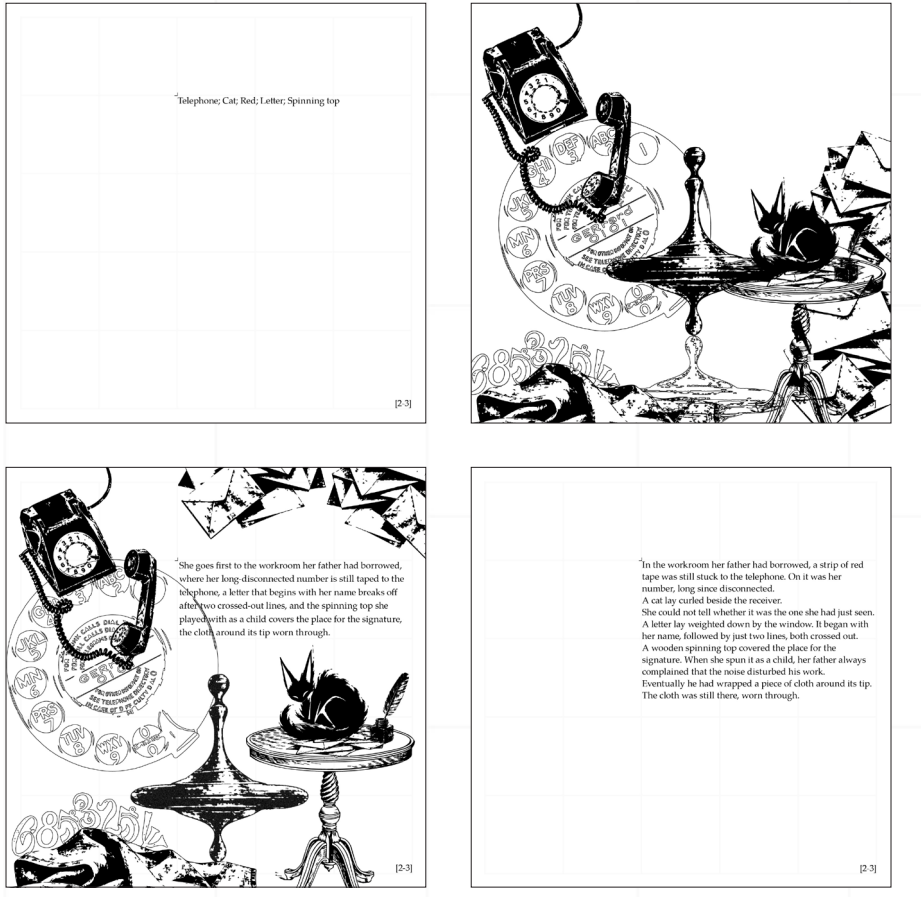


Fig. 14. *The Space of Rules*: one chapter in four forms

5. My Research Path

All four cases concern the transfer of authorship, and at each point my research moved in a slightly different direction.

Conditional Design treats the process as the work; I ask what the work communicates to readers once the process is over. LeWitt has executors simply execute; in my projects, participants can choose and even modify the rules, and when I became an executor myself, I found that execution still involves many decisions the rules never specified. *The Sheep Marke*t places ten thousand acts of participation side by side in a grid, making difference visible across the whole; I am more interested in what happens within each act of participation, and how one person's trace becomes the next person's starting point. Barthes's readers only read; my readers write, producing new chapters on top of the conditions I set.

These differences point to the same path: I am not studying what rules can generate, but tracing how creative intention passes through rules, arrangement and reading to be received, rewritten and continued by others.

Returning to the original question: when designers hand control to rules and to others, what happens to creative intention? My practice suggests that *giving up direct control over the image does not mean giving up creative intention, but giving up sole authority over the work's meaning*. Across my Unit 2 projects, creative intention was never copied intact, nor did it disappear when participants intervened. It was transformed as it passed through each designed stage.

Carrier of intention	**What it preserves**	**What it cannot fix**
Interactive mechanism	Behavioural conditions: what can be done, and in what order	Participants' choices
Text-image arrangement	Visible relationships between elements	The meaning behind those relationships
Reading process	Which meanings are made explicit, and when	What readers bring from their own experience

When participants intervene, the designer's intention becomes a starting point rather than an outcome that must be accurately restored. Readers of The *Twenty-Fifth Room* kept the relationships in the images but wrote new stories from their own experience. I therefore no longer see designer and participant as two sides competing for the right to interpret the work, but as people who generate meaning together: *the designer organises behaviour through rules, builds relationships through text and image, and guides reading through arrangement; participants continue, change or reinterpret the author's intention within these conditions.*

This research may offer three reflections for graphic and communication design. First, designers can consciously decide which relationships need to be fixed and which can be left to participants. Second, different media preserve intention to different degrees: relationships drawn into the image are the most stable, while causes written only in text are the most easily rewritten. Third, in participatory design, the more a designer tries to make rules appear neutral, the more hidden the author's position becomes. Rather than pretending to withdraw, a more honest approach is to make the rules public and keep each participant's trace visible.

These reflections become more important in the age of AI. When an image can be generated in seconds, the designer's value lies less in producing the image and more in making judgements: what rules to give participants, which relationships to fix in the image and which to leave for readers to complete, in what order information appears, and how participants' traces are recorded and credited. These judgements apply equally to commercial design that hands execution to others.

This research also leaves questions unanswered. If participants are co-authors, how should their contributions be credited and preserved? Would readers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds read the same relationships? And what happens when intention passes not through one reader but along a chain, where each person's story becomes the next person's conditions? These questions lead me towards the direction that interests me most: **digital media**. My projects have always taken place on screen, where every movement, pause and connection a participant makes can be recorded, replayed and passed on to the next person. Spencer Chang's *we were online* showed me that one person's trail online can become another's path; Jazmin Morris's *Sandbox* made me realise that online and offline can feed into each other and widen the ways into participation. Meanwhile, AI and 'vibe coding' allow designers to build interactive websites quickly; execution is no longer the barrier, and what really needs designing are rules, relationships and modes of participation. In the next stage, I hope to keep exploring: *as creation increasingly happens online — between people, and between people and machines — how will the designer's role change, and in what form will authorship exist?*

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