

# gridded behavior

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## INTRODUCTION

Next to the Hofbogen is a garden that receives water through the ZOHO rain letters. The garden has no structure and is overgrown with plants. The only thing that gives some structure is the large concrete blocks (Figure 1.1) (Figure 1.2) that the municipality has laid down that run through the garden as a path. The path lies in a certain composition that remains fixed and unchanging, while the plants around it blow around and change color and size seasonally. During our research, we found that nature is not necessarily fond of these power structures and often decides for itself where it wants to go. It cannot be influenced by the grid. This is a beautiful metaphor for us as people; even though the perfect system has been designed and applied, we always trust our feelings and instinct over the grid.

You see the same thing in graphic design. You should always follow a set of rules (grid, typography, programs, etc.) So the concept of the grid and breaking the rules can also be applied to a mentality, and way of working. We want to explore how this concept works within our process and how we can be able to rethink this.

From the grid of blocks, we will design systems that let us follow rules, but also allow our freedom. This shows the "constant state of variation" that grids are in and "gives them something of the animating features of living things". (Higgins, 2009).

In our work, we wonder to what extent you can follow your own instincts as a graphic designer and to what extent you continue to rely on a particular grid in your designs. We are going to capture our path and research into the grid in an animation that will tell this story. At the same time, in making the animation, we will work with our search through our grid and our own intuition.



Figure 1.1 - Concrete blocks location



Figure 1.2 - Concrete blocks location



## THE GRID

The concrete blocks in the garden next to the ZOHO letters are between the plants in a certain composition, quite graphic actually. As graphic designers, we also always have to deal with a grid where you can build certain styles and there are rules you have to follow. Wim Crouwel even based his entire Design Practice on this one grid. He saw the grid "as a kind of soccer field on which we will play our game." (Wim Crouwel Modernist).

The grid all started with the brick whose function was to give structure to certain buildings. From here, tablets emerged where people drew pictograms on them that were divided into grids, and after this the first cuneiform writing emerged. "Most cuneiform tablets concerned financial arrangements and legal agreements. Because they were organized in a grid to communicate it" (Higgins, 2009). "The ancient tablet expresses how human groups of various interests and political persuasions organized themselves through clearly communicated, behavioral consensus, ensuring stability via written language." (Higgins, 2009).

So tablets were already being used to subdivide people into social groups and to come up with certain rules, and that's how the first languages were formed. The grid is so deeply embedded in our society that it simply cannot be ignored. Our communication, rules and commerce are based on it.

In 1979, art historian Rosalind Krauss wrote an essay on grids. She describes the grid of modernist painting as "flattened, geometricized, ordered ... antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature." (Higgins, 2009).

There has been a lot of art made using the grid as inspiration. An example of a work is this famous painting by Piet Mondrian. (Figure 1). You see four stripes on a white canvas, it shows that when you hide parts of the grid, it's control is still so strong that it is still there.

Besides the fact that the grid is used a lot and you can hardly avoid it, there are also people and movements that go against the grid. Superstudio is an example of this. Superstudio used their images as a warning: "If the world and people did not change, the world would become as superstudio imagined it". ("Superstudio") (Figure 3)

Speed levitch also gave criticism in his documentary where he talks about the grid plan in New York. (Speedsister) His criticism of the design of the master plan is linked to the way of life that accepts only the status qua. He uses the grid plan as a metaphor as the architecture of life itself. Our own behaviors."

By researching the advantages and disadvantages of the grid, we became very interested in the contrast of this. To what extent can you still use your own feelings and how far can you go from the grid and still stay on the grid. We came to the conclusion that we didn't want to show a positive or negative image of the grid. We wanted to show that it exists and make people aware of it. If you are aware of this grid, you also learn in what way you can move around it yourself and make your own choices in this. By not being aware of it, you keep following it or resisting it

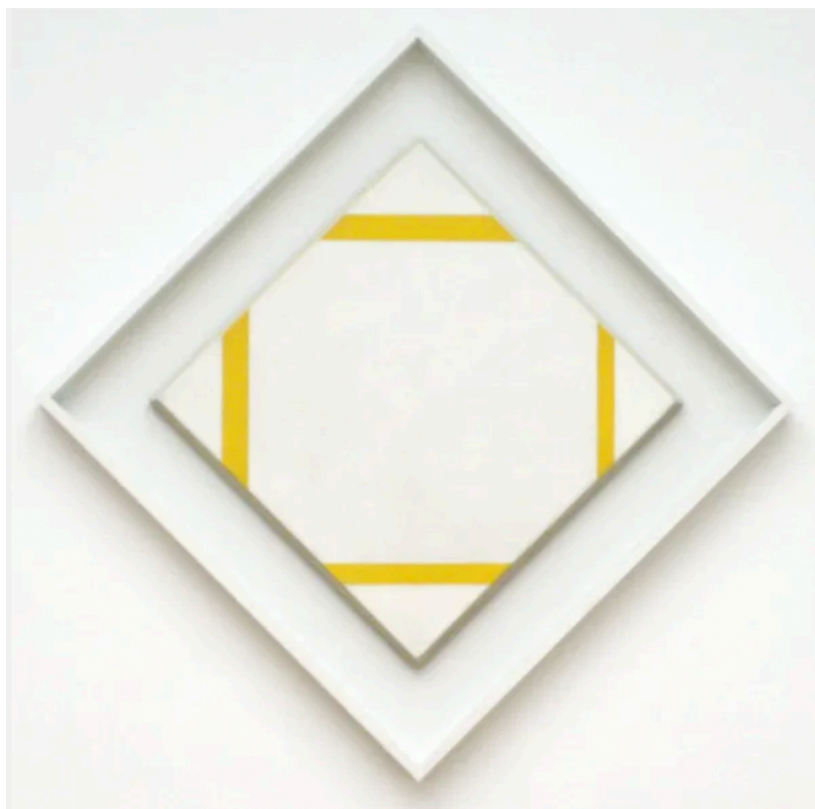


Figure 2 - Piet Mondriaan - Compositie met gele lijnen - Olieverf op doek



Figure 3 - Superstudio - 'Il Monumento Continuo' (1969)

## EXAMPLES IN NATURE EN LIFE

Because of our location, we were inspired by the contrast of the concrete blocks and nature and how nature actually moves around the blocks. The blocks always stay in the same place and don't change, but the plants move with the weather and seasons. We also found there was a kind of play function in the blocks. When we were at our location for a while, a few boys walked over them and said it was like a "trail" they were walking on. It all looks very playful, yet you are unconsciously following rules by walking along a path.

If you look at this trail (Figure 4), for example, it looks playful. Yet it lies here so that you will walk over it and you know, for example, that you have to move differently at the squares than when you walk over the line. Here it is very interesting how you can tell people things through different shapes and colors. So we wanted to continue this language of shapes in our project and it suits us as graphic designers very well.

Besides the fact that there are many visual forms of grids and rules, we looked for how the grid affects nature. You can see this for example in this rack (Figure 5) that causes the plant to grow on this, the tiles that this weed moves around (Figure 6) and hedges that are cut into squares. (Figure 7). Actually, it's pretty strange that we even deform nature into a kind of grid. To make people aware of this phenomenon, artist Bart Eysink Smeets did the same thing with plants and cut them into squares. (Figure 8)

Our inventions found in the city showed us in what visual ways the grid can be reflected and how we are always trying to keep steering things. It produced beautiful contrasting images that we also saw in our location. From here we began to think about how what we wanted to represent this in our own work. What I said in the previous chapter is that we wanted to make people aware of the grid, but that you also keep seeing how yourself and the rest of nature can move around it. The examples we found of this in the city ended up helping as visual inspiration in making our final result.



Figure 4 - Trail on the street





Figure 5 - Rack with plants



Figure 6 - Tiles with weeds



Figure 7 - Hedges cut in squares.



Figure 8 - Bart Eysink Smeets - Hedge, 2021



## BREAKING AND RESISTANCE OF THE GRID

In addition to the examples we went by about moving on and along the grid itself. We started looking at examples that deviate from the grid or play with certain rules and human instinct itself. In fact, the blocks at our location also reminded us of desire lines. These are pathways created by people cutting official paths and so creating new routes whose goal is to get from A to B using the shortest route. Now our location is not exactly a desire path, it was eventually created by the municipality itself, but still it looks like a kind of cut-off by nature that is not part of the normal road structure of the city.

One artist who started working with these desire paths in his architecture is Rem Koolhaas. Rem Koolhaas is an architect who started working with these desire lines when designing for a university campus. He used a team of students for two days, documenting how students walked to certain places. (Figure 9). "These circulation paths became the foundation for the development of the campus hallways, with widths designed proportionally to the volume of students recorded during observation." (BrandCulture)

In the end, our biggest inspiration was Studio Moniker's take on their projects. This studio believes "in designing systems that entice to follow rule, but also allow a bit of anarchy." (Moniker). An example of this is the Conditional Design Workbook. (Figure 10) This is a book with consists of workshops that invite the reader to participate. In my first year at this school, we also got some assignments from this book. It was cool to see how certain rules actually allow you to stay creative and allow everyone to have a different outcome.

From here we started to come up with our own rules and took as our basis the composition and grid of the stones of our location. From here we wanted to see how we as designers could move around this grid and what freedom or rules are involved.

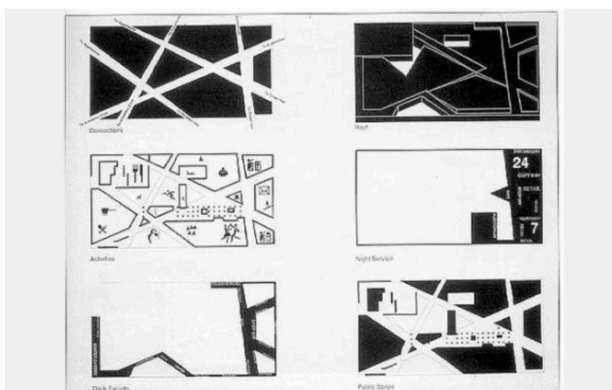


Figure 9 - McCormick Tribune Campus Centre Circulation Paths, 1997

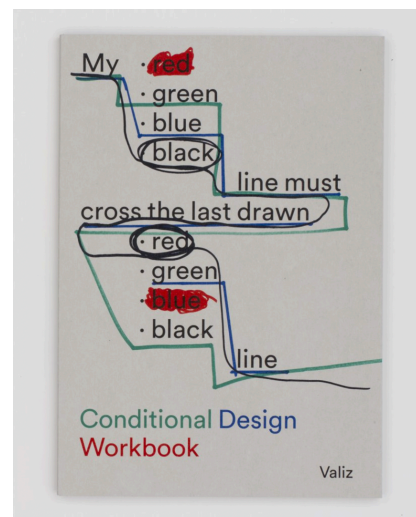


Figure 10 - Studio Moniker - Conditional Design Workbook

## GRIDDED BEHAVIOR

In our final work (Figure 11), we started to explore our own grid of the blocks by making our own rules. We started to draw out the grid and then took the points of the corners of the blocks to start working with this. In the process we gave ourselves rules such as: 'Make shapes using the dots' (Figure 12.1, 12.2) or 'expand something from the dots' (Figure 13.1, 13.2). With these we played with certain rules, the grid and our own intuition to create designs from this. From here we started to see which designs we felt were closest and furthest away from the grid and put this in order. Right from the beginning of the period we knew we would like to make an animation, because it is something we wanted to experiment more with in our field in analog and digital. Also, because grids and the material of what they contain are in a constant state of variation, it works well to tell our story through this technique.

In our final animation, we told a story of someone going through the grid of blocks and trying to follow their own feelings and intuition. The poem you hear below the video is based on our own search through the grid and our inventions we made in it. It is supported with animations that consists of the points of the grid of the stones and thus also shows our own path in the exploration of working with the grid and following our intuition in design. The shapes we used start as the square blocks (Figure 14, 15, 16) and become more and more natural and made on our own ideas, but still keeping to the rules of the grid. (Figure 17, 18, 19, 20, 21)

The ultimate goal of the animation is to show how everything is always based on a certain grid, but how you can still follow your own feeling in this. You can't go off the grid until you know the grid exists and how it works.

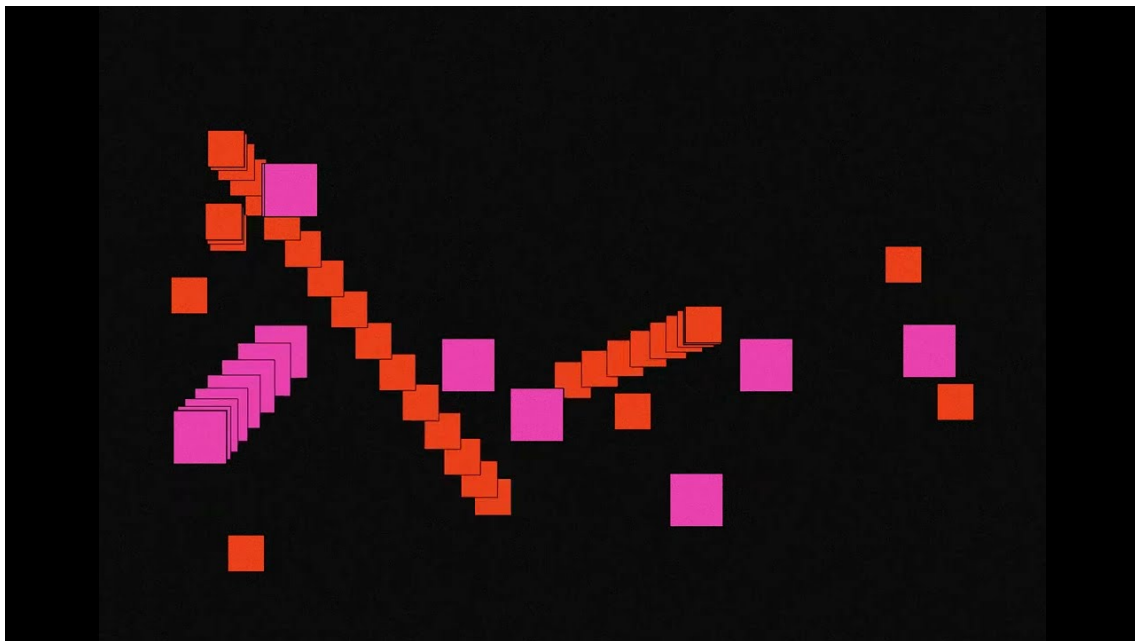


Figure 11 - Final animation, <https://youtu.be/UjR9rZ7fxll>

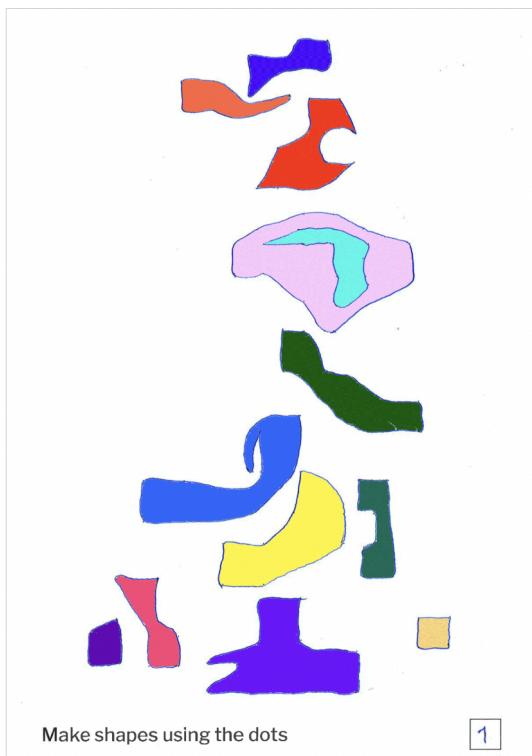


Figure 12.1 - Sketch grid, with rules



Figure 12.2 - Sketch grid, with rules

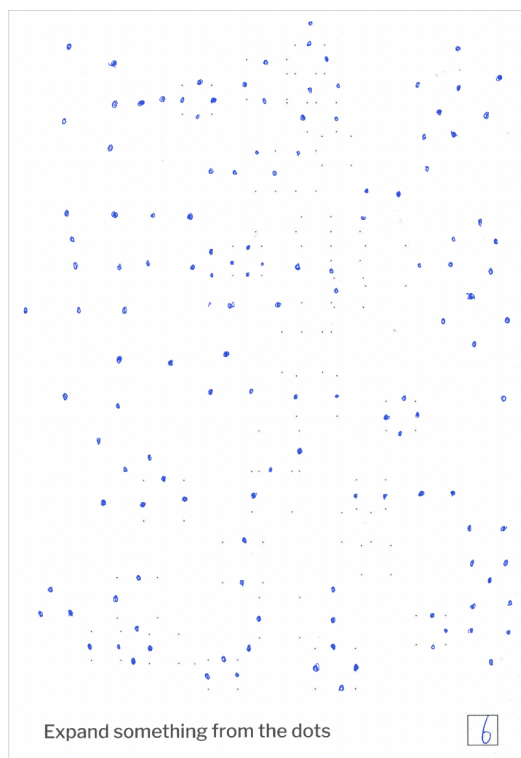


Figure 13.1 - Sketch grid, with rules

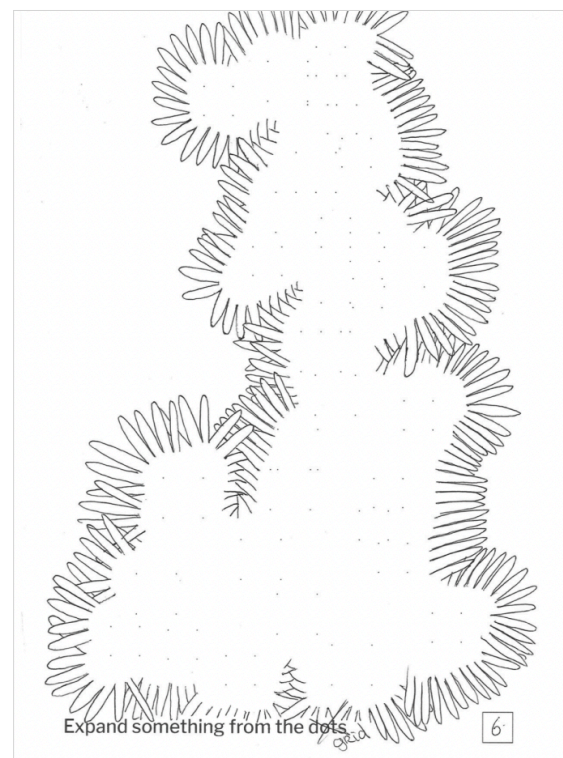


Figure 13.2 - Sketch grid, with rules

## gridded behavior

today I walked through a garden  
the plants lined up in horizontal and vertical lines  
below my feet, there was a path made out of little squares  
they felt so flat, like kitchen tiles  
yet I wasn't in a kitchen at all  
following the rules, I followed the track deep into the grid

everything had so much structure  
yet I didn't feel relaxed in this garden at all.  
it feels like nature turned its back on itself  
the plants didn't ask to be planted every 5 centimeters  
and I didn't wish to walk in straight lines

I tried to cut off some of the nonsensical straight roads  
like many before me  
they weren't designed for me  
they also weren't designed for the plants

the little squares on the path were yelling at me for breaking the rules  
the plants, each seeded 5 centimeters apart were cheering me on from the sidelines

every year they tried to break free  
every summer, they are cut back into perfect rectangles  
sometimes though, they get close  
little seeds will start to grow around the squares on which I stroll  
nature tries to break the rules, following its instinct.

flowers flourish  
their beautiful colors filling up the grey and structured garden  
they give me hope  
while they bloom, I now understand that I am following them

then I realize; a small seed has been growing inside of me as well  
one filled with hope, instead of vivid flowers

I continue my walk, as thoughts about planning and structure disappear into the wild  
garden inside of my mind  
new ideas start to emerge, possibilities  
without keeping these restrictions in mind  
yet these ideas can only survive due to the knowledge that these rules exist.

Figure 14 - Poem Gridded Behavior



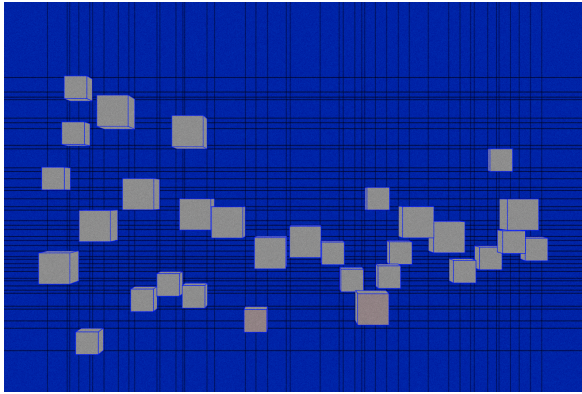


Figure 15 - Still from animation - Gridded Behavior

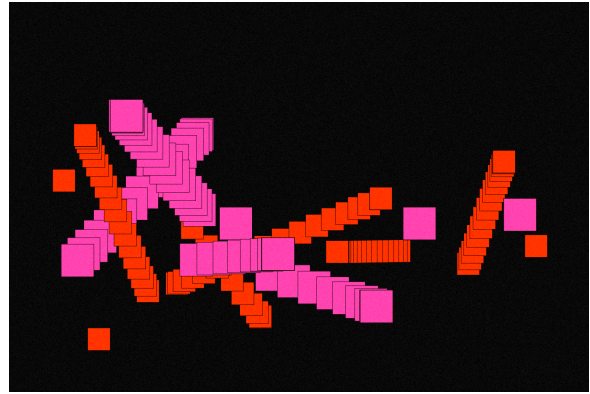


Figure 16 - Still from animation - Gridded Behavior

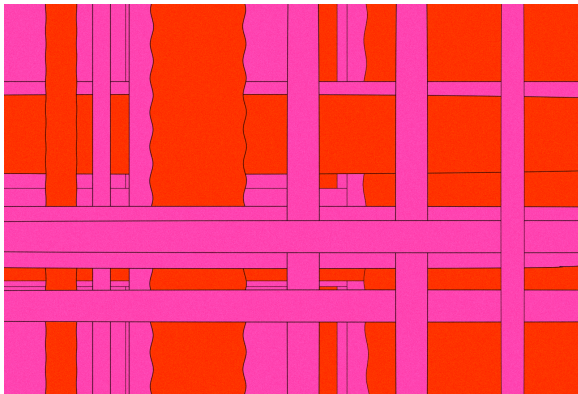


Figure 17 - Still from animation - Gridded Behavior

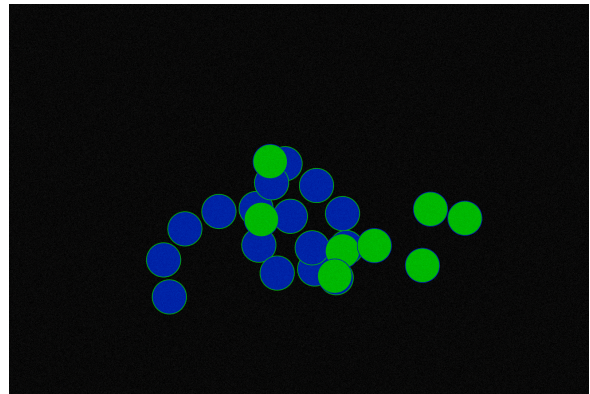


Figure 18 - Still from animation - Gridded Behavior



Figure 19 - Still from animation - Gridded Behavior

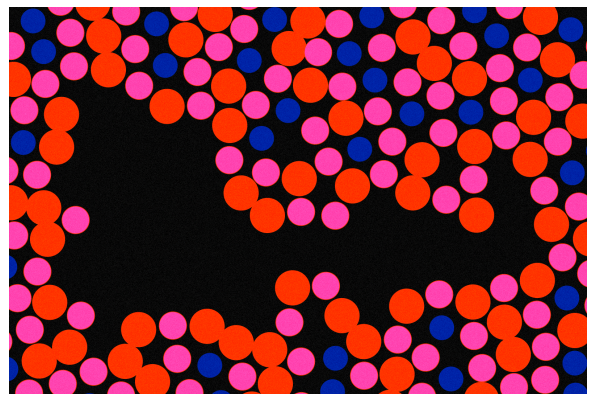


Figure 20 - Still from animation - Gridded Behavior

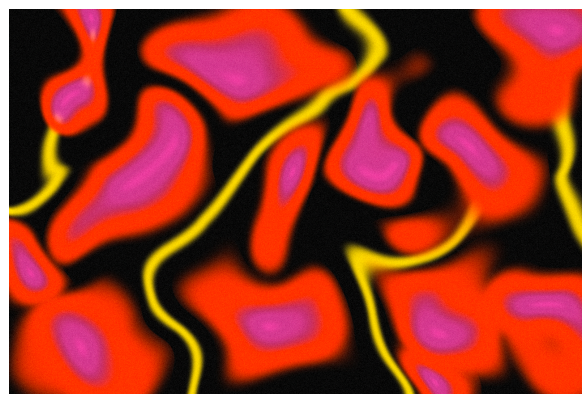


Figure 21 - Still from animation - Gridded Behavior



Figure 22 - Still from animation - Gridded Behavior

## **CONCLUSION**

So without a grid, you cannot go off the grid. The grid is so deeply woven into the system is of how we live and how everything around us is built, that we can only learn to understand it and move around it. Of course you can make your own choices in this based on your feelings, yet it will always come from a certain grid in life.

In our work, we let other people become aware of the grid itself. By discovering certain grids, you can find your own way through them and form your own ideas according to them.

When starting this project, I never imagined how interesting I would find the grid system and how it started from a simple brick. I have enjoyed researching this subject and has inspired me a lot for my own design Practice. In my work I have always used symbols, color and grids a lot to shape my own ideas. This project has again confirmed how much I enjoy it and this also gives me more confidence towards my graduation.

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