

Vera Molnar's Drawing Machines: A Media Archaeology of Early Computer Graphics

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How do you draw a line with a computer? When the Hungarian-born, Paris-based artist Vera Molnar (1924-2023) began experimenting with electronic computers in 1968, this task was not as simple as the click of a mouse or the swipe of a finger. Molnar had to translate her visual

language of geometric abstraction into alphanumeric instructions that a computer would understand. Though she generated thousands of computer plotter “drawings” over the next two decades, she left behind limited technical documentation from this period, leaving it up to viewers to imagine the algorithms behind her compositions. This lecture presents a media archeology of the artist’s work — a hands-on approach that engages not only with her drawings but also her process of drawing with a computer. I will recount my “reenactment” of Molnar’s series *Lettres de ma mère* (*My mother’s letters*, 1988) using obsolete hardware and software that the artist once used. This practice-led approach foregrounds the artist’s process and historically contextualizes the material history and user experience of early interactive computing, which have been all but forgotten.



Wednesday, May 14 at 5:30pm, INTS 1128

Zsofi Valyi-Nagy and Stefan Höltgen, Reenactment of Vera Molnar's *Lettres de ma mère* (1988) in BASIC on a Tektronix 4052 microcomputer, June 2022, Signallabor, Institut für Medienwissenschaft der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany (Photo by Julia Sandor, Artykfilm)