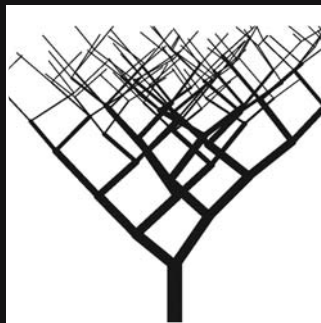
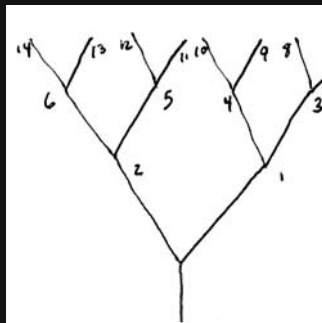


## 2 CREATIVE CODING



I have a friend, Mark K., who was a web developer who had artistic yearnings (don't they all). I met him a number of years ago when he enrolled in a 3D animation course I was teaching. Mark worked for a sizable, very businessy type company that will remain nameless, doing pretty dull programming. Mostly he was working on legacy code—stuff other people had written—and trying to keep things together with band-aids and string. On top of this, his company was outsourcing most of the interesting development work overseas, and Mark also had the fun job of trying to coordinate video conferences at all hours of the night (big time difference), while integrating their code (in a programming language/development environment he wasn't too familiar with) back into the company's legacy spaghetti (disorganized and poorly structured) code. Is it any surprise Mark was pretty sour on coding and dreamed about painting rainbows and unicorns in the Elysian Fields? Well, actually it was more like working in the game industry. We met at the perfect time.

While Mark was losing his passion for coding, I was losing my passion for pretty much everything else. I was dreading teaching the 3D course at the time, an area just a few years prior I had been passionately involved in. However, my spirits lifted on the first day of class when I met Mark. As a first day ice-breaker, I usually have each student tell me a little about themselves. When Mark described his programming background, I immediately imagined us having these long, intense discussions about the joys and intricacies of coding. Of course this fantasy was shot down quickly as Mark continued to explain his interest of eventually entering the game or animation industry and his waning interest in programming. A little disappointed, I summoned encouragement for his new interest and ambition and settled in for a long semester. In the end, the semester turned out to be great. Mark discovered an innate gift and interest in design, and the discussions I originally imagined having with Mark did indeed happen, but of course in a different and actually far more interesting way. Mark and I also developed a real friendship that continues to this day.

One of the subjects that Mark and I often discussed was the intuitive vs. analytical nature of coding. Mark had been formally trained as a programmer and thus had developed a “look before you leap” approach to coding that spilled into his other creative work as well. He was trained to analyze a problem, develop a plan, and then implement it. I on the other hand, trained as a fine artist, was taught to let go of the need to understand everything, and to learn to find structure and meaning in the process. Obviously, the utilitarian aspects of programming and the pretty much complete lack of utility of painting contributed to the approaches adopted in our training. At this point, I was mostly coding little graphics experiments with ActionScript. I would sit on the couch with the TV on, the laptop burning my legs (PowerBook G4), snacks of course, and tweak code until cool things started happening. Eventually one of my convoluted, incomprehensible equations would start yielding something I liked. Then I'd do a “save as” and keep tweaking until I found something else. I was able to hack out tons of art, watch bad reality TV, and still IM Mark during renderings. Mark was always amazed that I could approach programming that way. He just couldn't see it as an intuitive medium. We eventually tried some collaboration, but would often get stuck in our planning vs. implementing discussions. In time, though, we both began to learn from one another. I began planning some stuff before attacking by the seat of my pants, and Mark began to “throw some dung against the side of the barn.” I really began to see the virtue in Mark's analytical approach when my projects began to get more complex and I started developing larger applications and reusable classes (which I'll cover a bit later). I hope Mark was able to learn from me as well, which seems to be the case, as he eventually landed an art director's position, and also has begun to enjoy coding again—with Processing, of course.