



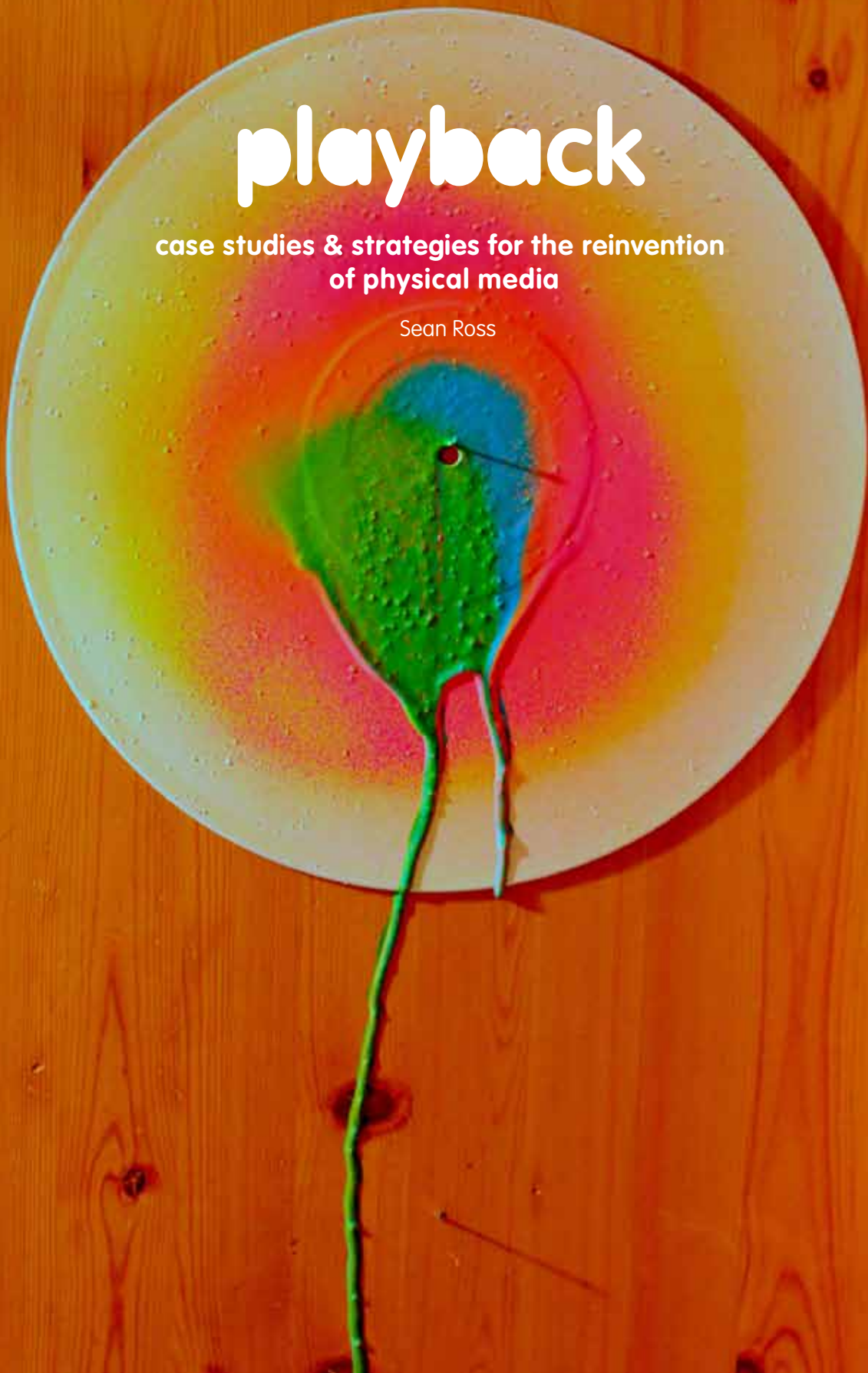
playback

case studies & strategies for the reinvention of physical media // Sean Ross

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of physical media

Sean Ross



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The Graduate Program in Design
California College of the Arts
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Playback:

Case Studies and Strategies
for the Reinvention of Physical Media

MFA Thesis by
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// WHIP IT GOOD

the	thesis	abstracted
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From the early to mid 19th century, the human race has been enchanted with, perhaps even hypnotized by-our technological ability to record and play back images and sound; to create permanent record of our individual and collective experiences, distilled to pure sensorial information.

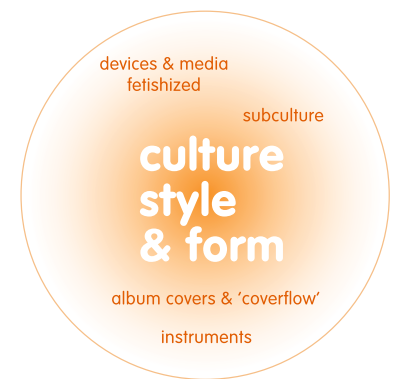
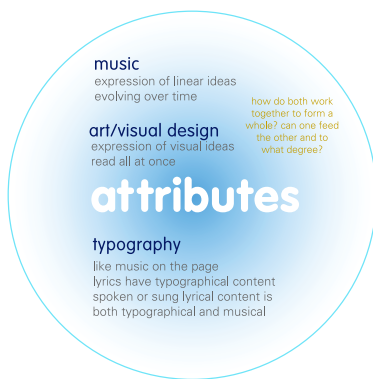
Media is the name given to this ever-changing technology, which affords us a powerful mirror of ourselves and our culture.

As far back in time as I can remember, recorded sound has been a key influence on my understanding of the world, as well a driver of my creative development within it. As a child I whipped a microphone above my head like the rotors of a helicopter while simultaneously screaming like a banshee. This created a brand new sensory experience there were just no words for.



The cassette tape case at Aquarius Records on Valencia Street in San Francisco, Ca. November 2010. I interviewed Jim Haynes, an employee there about the recent resurgence in the cassette format in the underground noise scene. We discussed how the format itself serves as an elitist barrier to entry for the casual listener, given the level of commitment one must have to own dated technology.

THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF SOUND



Exploration space, Sean Ross 2010

Designed listening experiences of either a musical or non-musical nature hold my imagination captive. It is my personal belief that recorded sound is the perfect media, and is my favorite because of the way it can blend with other sensory experiences, and how personal and meaningful that can become.

I recognize that my love for this media has a lot to do with when I was born, and the times I grew up in, the 70s and 80s. Radio was still king. Video games were primitive, not even close to the immersive digital worlds my son inhabits with his PS3. MTV hadn't been invented yet; we didn't even have television or computers in my house until I was much older.

I'm interested in bringing some of the qualities of the analog age which we seem to have lost, back into the digital age; that of materiality, physicality, tactility, intentionality, personality, permanence, and playfulness.

// WHIP IT GOOD

I first became interested in the problem of music losing it's physical form, which happened gradually, with the transition from the vinyl record to the CD, and finally dematerialized altogether, with all data moving to the cloud, making music even more ephemeral & disposable

I believe that if we did some of these things, and continued to innovate playback media in new directions, we might be able to save the recording industry from itself, while simultaneously re-educating audiences that truly great works of art are worth supporting – no longer just disposable marketing giveaways, but the revered and beloved artifacts of shared emotions.

.My thesis aims to serve as a critical analysis and critique of culture and commerce in our digitally mediated and dematerialized era, as well as dive deeply into a formal and methodological series of process driven investigations that explore the re-embodiment of tactile, analog nature in parallel realms of sound and vision. Lastly, I will explore a business concept that is a springboard for the re-introduction of the tangible artifact as a highly personal one-off archival record.

research & methodology

My research will consist of a series of formal and written investigations into the following:

- What are the properties & effects of specific media in our lifetimes? How does each step in the progressive chain change us as individuals, as a culture? What, if anything, remains constant? How do these various media designs function on a technical level, and how do these modes of operation impart qualities onto the 'PURE' information itself and the resulting experience, intended or not? Media such as floppy discs, hard drives, LP records, cassettes, even physical space as mediator, are all analyzed and compared in regards to the natures and effects of these artifacts & media on individuals and culture.
- A series of formal/methodological investigations involving materials and processes which generate sound and image in parallel, in order to synthesize (cross-pollinate) across sensorial boundaries in an attempt to re-embody the analog creative experience. PHASE ONE will collect discreet video clips which generate sound and image at once. PHASE TWO will be to attempt to compose and resolve these clips inside a performance-based sequencing environment using custom built software.
- A business model / product concept called "Make Your Own Damn Record", with associated prototypes for one-off recordings which innovate form(at); including a case study for a family writing and recording an audiovisual memory keepsake, which will be etched & printed.



The Moody Blues, *In Search of the Lost Chord*, 1967



The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 1967

an introduction

Acoustic space is organic and integral, perceived through the simultaneous interplay of all the senses whereas "rational" or pictorial space is uniform, sequential and continuous and creates a closed world with none of the rich resonance of the tribal echoland.

The man of the tribal world led a complex, kaleidoscopic life precisely because the ear, unlike the eye, cannot be focused and is synaesthetic rather than analytical and linear. Speech is an utterance, or more precisely, an outering, of all our senses at once; the auditory field is simultaneous, the visual successive.

The models of life of nonliterate people were implicit, simultaneous and discontinuous, and also far richer than those of literate man. By their dependence on the spoken word for information, people were drawn together into a tribal mesh; and since the spoken word is more emotionally laden than the written-conveying by intonation such rich emotions as anger, joy, sorrow, fear-tribal man was more spontaneous and passionately volatile.

Audile-tactile tribal man partook of the collective unconscious, lived in a magical integral world patterned by myth and ritual, its values divine and unchallenged, whereas literate or visual man creates an environment that is strongly fragmented, individualistic, explicit, logical, specialized and detached.

The whole man became fragmented man; the alphabet shattered the charmed circle and resonating magic of the tribal world, exploding man into an agglomeration of specialized and psychically impoverished "individuals," or units, functioning in a world of linear time and Euclidean space.

-Marshall McLuhan

Old Record Sleeve, Sean Ross 2010

Synesthesia: the production of a sense impression relating to one sense or part of the body by stimulation of another sense or part of the body

Synesthesiastic: an idea which starts in one media and is translated into another*

* I made this word up

A close-up photograph of a gold snare drum, showing the tension rods and the snare wires. The background is a light, textured surface.

**no
wants
be**

**one
to
defeated**

Ringo Starr's Gold Snare Drum, New York
Metropolitan Museum of Art, Sean Ross 2010

// BE SYNESTHESIASTIC: SOUND AND VISION



Christian Marclay 2008

Christian Marclay (born 1955) is an American visual artist and composer based in New York. Marclay's work explores connections between sound, sculpture, photography, performance, video, and film. A pioneer of using gramophone records and turntables as musical instruments to create sound collage, Marclay is, in the words of critic Thom Jurek, perhaps the "unwitting inventor of turntablism." His own use of turntables and records, beginning in the mid-1970s, was developed independently of but roughly parallel to hip hop's use of the instrument.

I am drawn to and inspired by Marclay's work specifically for how it straddles the middle ground of both the visual and audio realms, a hybrid audio-visual form. His work often defies easy categorization.

Christian Marclay, Festival, NYC 2010
photograph by Sean Ross

This is from Marclay's "Festival" show at the Whitney in NYC which I attended this summer. This shot is some of the musical ephemera Marclay has collected and curated, the idea is that musical notation in the world of graphic design is really a fake out; it uses the look and feel of the language without understanding the underlying system. Marclay then has actual musicians attempt to play these scrolls of notational ephemera.

Synesthesia, "the production of a sense impression relating to one sense or part of the body by stimulation of another sense or part of the body," could be extrapolated further to mean, an idea that starts in one media and is translated into another, such as Christian Marclay's pillow made of cassette tape, titled *The Beatles*.



Christian Marclay, "The Beatles", 1989

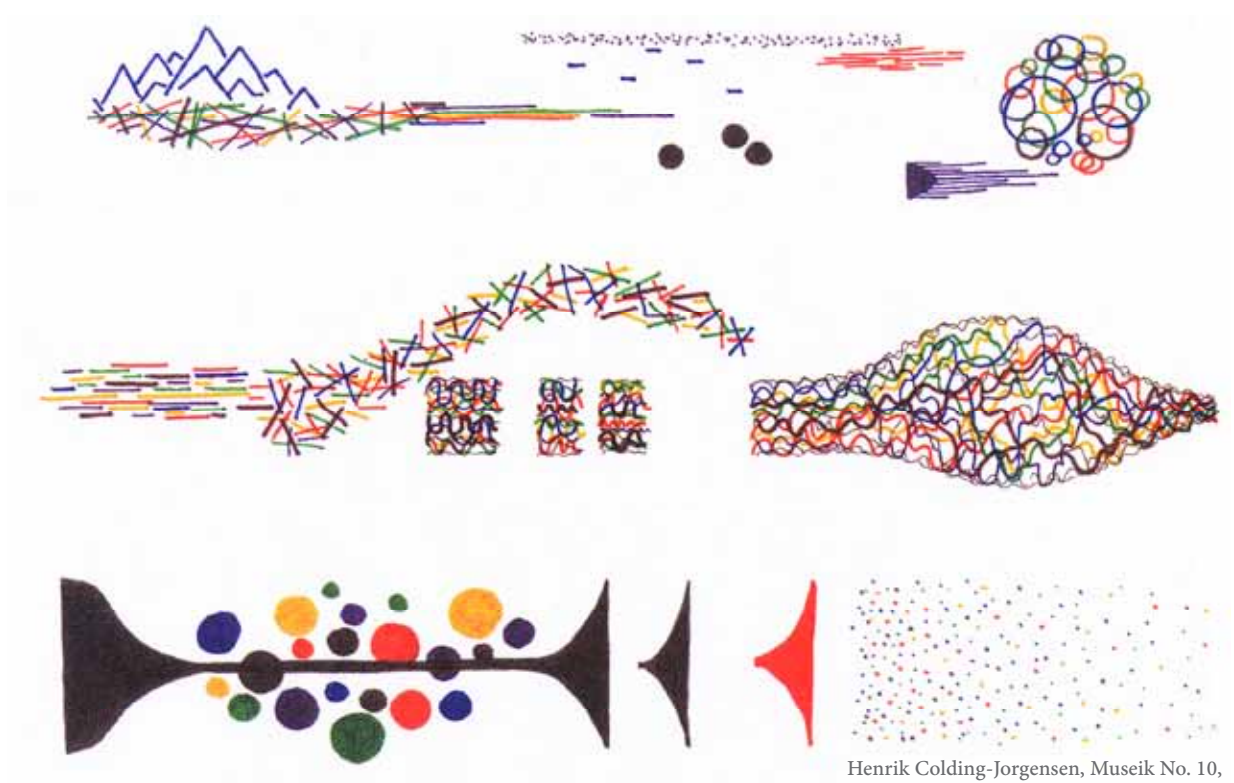


Adam Guzman, SF Bay Guardian 2010

designer	as	performer
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I discovered another recent design MFA graduate from Art Center in Pasadena, Ca. who did his thesis on a similar topic as mine. He is now designing visual work to accompany live music performances. This was the exact same idea I had when I began approaching my work with Max/MSP & Jitter, as I noticed a lot of live performance using stock and canned projection imagery, and wondered if there might be a design opportunity there.

influences



sound

+

vision

This work is a graphic notation for a group of very young instrumentalists. It comes from the book *Notations21*, which is a compendium of musicians who are creating experimental notation; our own Guillermo Gallindo is also included in this work. This type of artwork serves as both abstract visual design and musical notation, and is interesting to me because it can be read as both music notation and visual art.



Sean Ross, Form Studies: Glass, Water, Ink & Paper, 2010

// BE SYNESTHESIASTIC: SOUND AND VISION

As a way to investigate the properties of the older media that I grew up with, I introduced a record player back into my home, and placed it in the social center of my family, the kitchen table. I bought a ton of new vinyl, mainly for my five year old daughter. It brought along with it a level of joy in my house that i was frankly surprised by; everyone got into it. My daughter, who is a typical over-stimulated 5 year old kid, now hardly ever asks to watch a movie (which is passive entertainment), instead playing her favorite record, simultaneously engaging in imaginative play.



Columbia GP-3 Portable Record Player



Minette Strahan-Ross at her craft table with Bambi Record, 2010

I also began a process of creating sound, which informed visual work, as well as creating visual work which informed the creation of sound. Here is an experimental notation which Lara Manzanares and I created, and then performed.



Afghanistan, Sean Ross & Lara Manzanares, 2010

investigations

Conversely, here is a visual which was created from a song, titled visualization of 2 chords interlocked in a looping pattern. As you can see here, I also created digital and analog versions of the visualization itself, which serves to demonstrate the clean and dirty natures of these media.



Visualization of 2 chords interlocked in a looping pattern: Digital. Sean Ross, 2010



Visualization of 2 chords interlocked in a looping pattern: Analog. Sean Ross, 2010

sound clip >> <http://www.dsrstudio.com/2-chords-interlocked-in-a-looping-pattern.mp3>

// BE SYNESTHESIASTIC: SOUND AND VISION

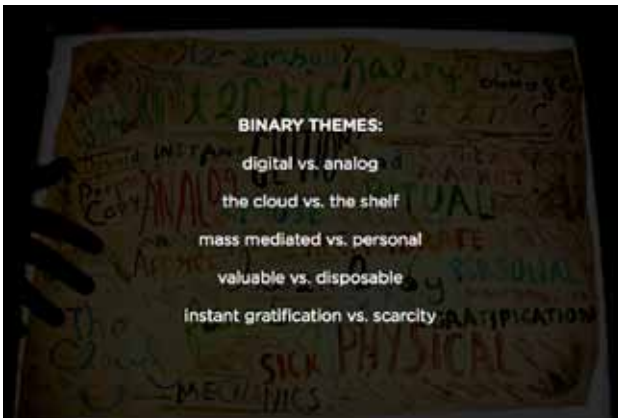
A quick & dirty 'mind map' of some overarching themes to my investigations.

Gluttony, the sheer amount of media people collect and have access to has increased; subsequently it's value has decreased. Also since everything is online, there is little need to hunt anything down, which is a key ingredient in true enjoyment, I think.

Disembodiment - the idea that physicality is actually a layer of pleasure that is missing from digital media, but existed in the media of the past, which employed analog processes of mechanics, electricity, & imperfection, and the intentionality of putting a record on, as well as the pause of turning it over.



The Cloud is the opposite of physicality; the giant automated data recorder that is evolving through the behemoth of google and the internet is cataloging our entire human experience as a "perfect copy" and writing it to a giant hard drive in the sky, one which is disconnected from us and out of our individual control.



These themes are distilled further to what are the binary themes, or polar opposites that I find recurring throughout my investigations, **1. Digital vs. Analog, 2. The Cloud vs. the Shelf, 3. Mass Mediated vs. Personal, 4. Valuable vs. Disposable, 5. Instant Gratification vs. Scarcity**

investigations

I was also interested in the idea of using pre-recorded media along with musical instruments as a kind of therapeutic creative process, which I tried out with a friend of mine and his family. The idea here is to codify a process whereby non-musicians can interact with prerecorded or pre-existing structures of media and sound, and create something meaningful and novel, to then ultimately press into their own vinyl record as a keepsake. I asked them to draw one another, as a way to combine the processes of sound and image making; the images would then be used to screen print on the record itself.



Anthony family: recording a family song, 2011



Anthony family drawn portraits, 2011

sound clip >> http://www.dsstudio.com/mr_monkey_medium.mp3
sound clip >> <http://www.dsstudio.com/party.mp3>

// BE SYNESTHESIASTIC: SOUND AND VISION

During my research I also took some trips out into the field.

Musée Mécanique, the Mechanical Museum at Fisherman's Wharf, San Francisco

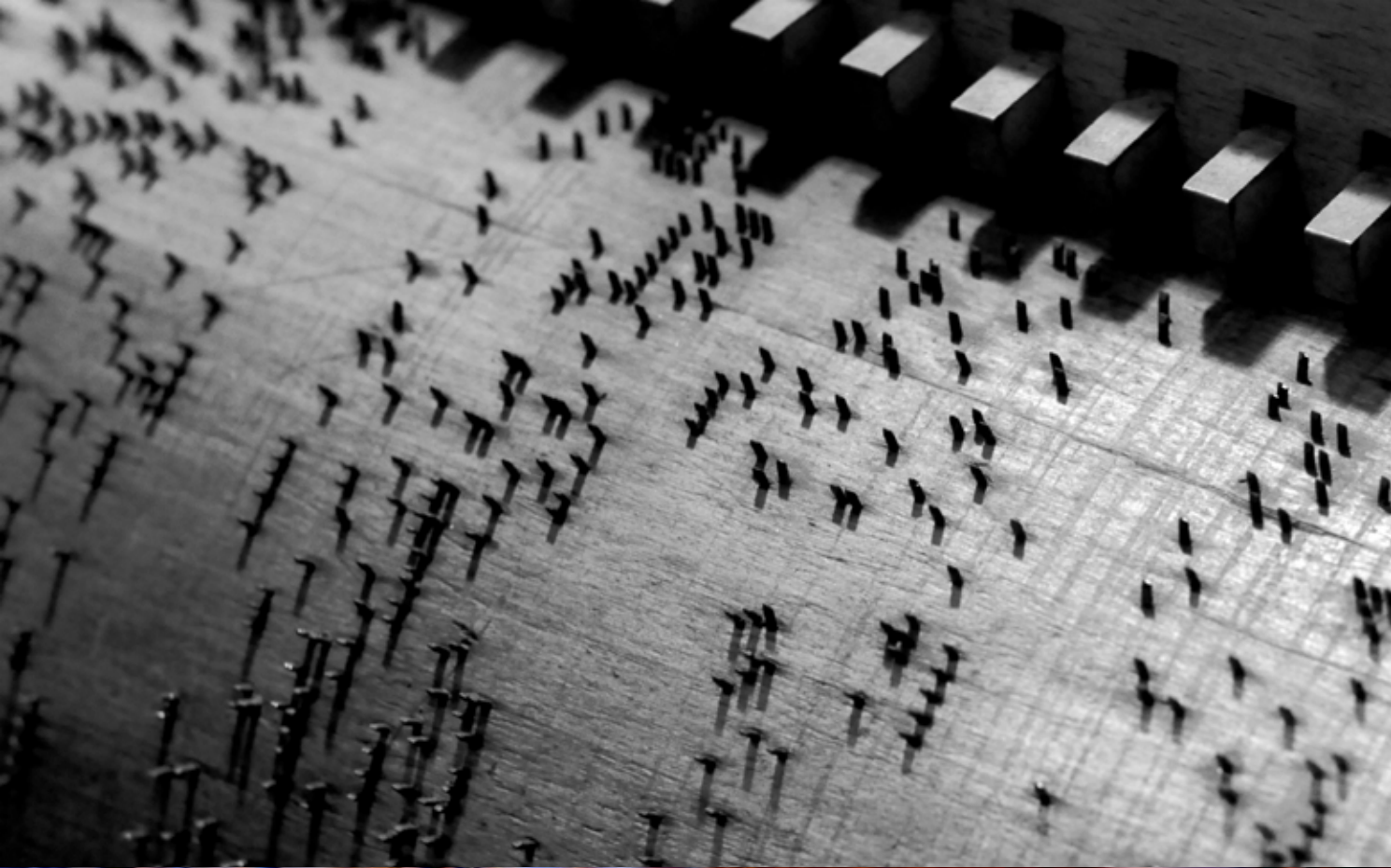
I was interested in exploring what happened when we moved from the mechanical age, when we could actually see and interact with the process by which an effect is produced, and the change to digital processes, which are mysterious, imperceptible and cold.

The instrument above, and several others there like it-player piano style devices which utilize forms of physical notational data which act as triggers for some form of mechanical process—were reminiscent to me of MIDI data. There seems to be a direct linkage between player piano and MIDI, and I began wondering how I might use these analog and digital playback processes in new and unexplored ways.

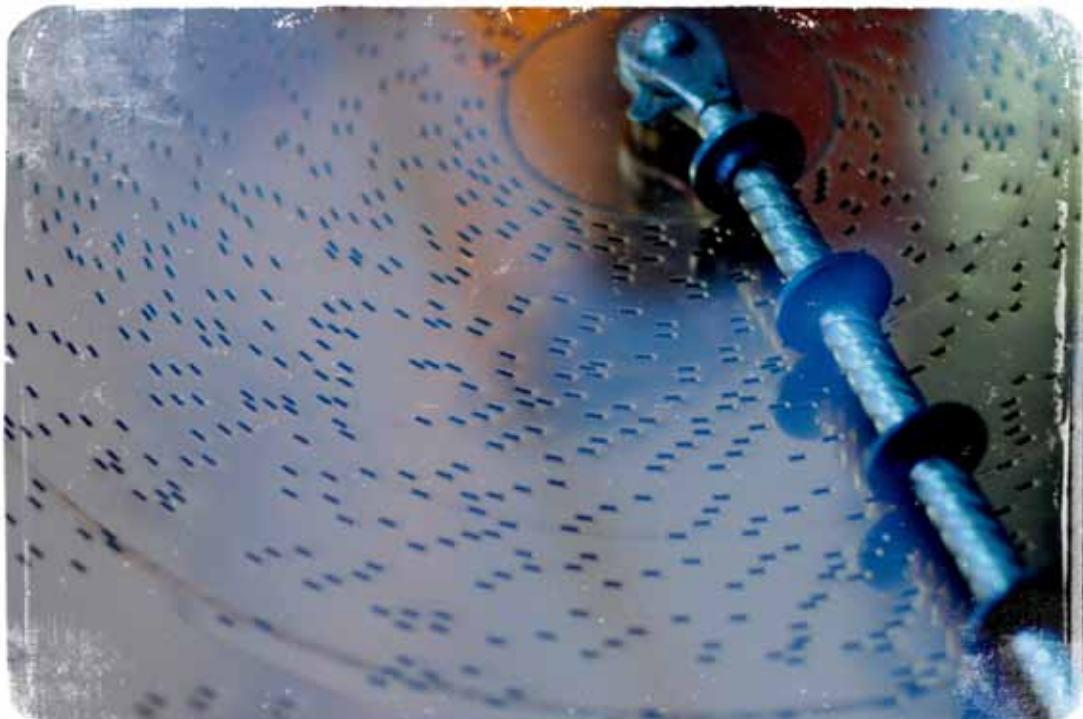


Various machines, Sean Ross 2010

sound clip >> http://dsrstudio.com/dsr_walking_on_sunshine.mp3



// BE SYNESTHESIASTIC: SOUND AND VISION



REGINA



// BE SYNESTHESIASTIC: SOUND AND VISION

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

The Met in NYC, has a great collection of early instruments which further serve to illustrate our history with mechanical sound.



The Met, NYC, Sean Ross, 2010

investigations

Transference, 2010

This is an exhibit I attended in the Castro in San Francisco, at the Pop Up Museum of Craft and Design. Called Transference, it is a collaboration between Glass artist Andy Paiko and sound artist Ethan Rose . It consists of uniquely handblown and sculpted vessels which are harmonically tuned, automated & randomized which results in a regenerative, kinetic musical instrument that interacts with the sound of city life and never plays the same piece twice.



Transference Exhibit, Sean Ross, 2010

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the death of one medium
in favor of another
leaves in it's wake
an absence

of the
physical

// THE DEATH OF THE PHYSICAL

Legendary designer Ettore Sottsass once said that Design is a way of discussing life. For most of the 20th century, the gramophone record was one of the most beloved and culturally significant media, used to play music and other recorded programs in the home. The LP, or Long Play, was my first introduction to what would end up becoming a lifetime fascination—the recording arts. One of the first technical feats of my youth was learning how to put a Beatles record on my Dad's turntable. I would sit for hours with his giant stereo headphones, as the innovative productions of Sir George Martin expanded my developing mind.

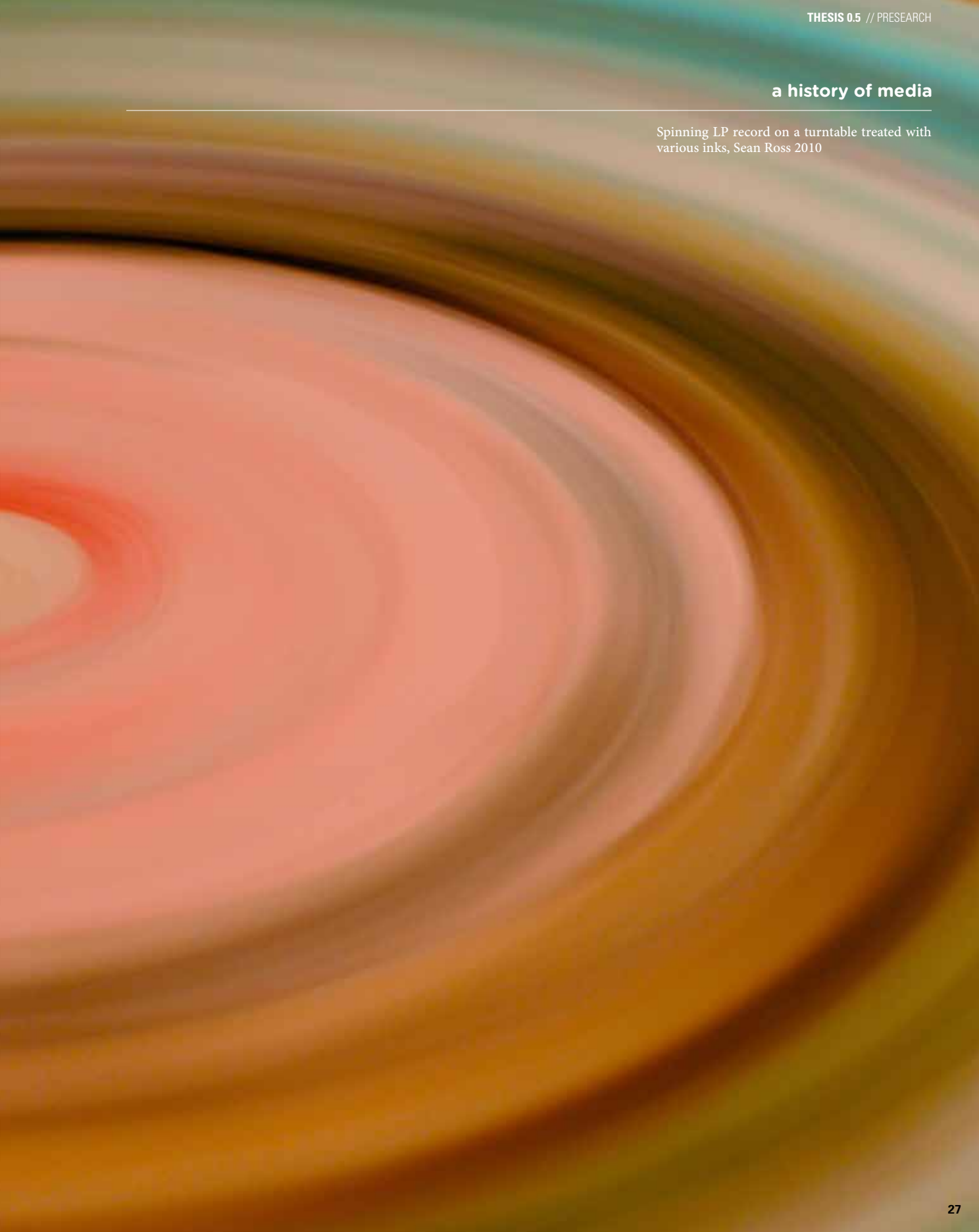


Stinson Beach, Ca. 1975 Self Portrait, Pencil Sean Ross 2007

sound clip >> <http://dsrstudio.com/the-death-of-the-physical.mp3>

a history of media

Spinning LP record on a turntable treated with various inks, Sean Ross 2010



// THE DEATH OF THE PHYSICAL



It's a Hit, Sean Ross, 2010

For my mom it was Howdy Doody, my dad it was most likely a book—for my own son, I'm sad to say I think it may have been Pokemon. Every generation has a media object that helps to define them somehow in the cultural trajectory, or as an individual.

I grew up in Marin County, the other side of Mt. Tam in a small town called Stinson Beach. We didn't have television because Cable hadn't been invented yet, and no broadcast reception could make it over the hill. This deprivation ended up working in our favor. We spent most of our waking hours outside playing in some of the most beautiful surroundings on earth, and we didn't even really know it at the time. We weren't poor, but we didn't have a lot of things. One of the best things ever was my dad's stereo, which in my youth completely replaced television.

Listening to recorded music stimulated my imagination and created visualizations and narrative forms which were entirely my own interpretations—songs are designed to manipulate our emotions, but we also attach our own meaning to them, making them “ours.” In this way, records were a cool medium compared to television, in that they allowed a high level of mental/emotional participation—one which I would later employ when discovering my dad's cassette recorders and microphones.

My love of recording as a youth would lead me to create original audio plays, conduct amateur sociology experiments, interview my friends at school, as well as recording television shows, records, and ambient sounds which I would add my own narration to. This was my version of YouTube I suppose. It will undoubtedly make me sound old to say these primitive tools were more immediate, more inspired, and more genuine avenues to self-discovery and expression than the cornucopia of high tech media manipulation we have today. We take so much for granted and I believe we are swimming to a large extent in mediocrity. But we seem to enjoy participating, even at the detriment of skill, depth, and developed talent. I view records as artifacts from a time before everyone became a media star, internet famous, and blogged to death.

That's not to say there weren't crap records. But when you are drowning in media, it's a lot harder to find truly great art. And our digital tools and way of life have sped up the means of production to such a degree that I don't believe true masterpieces are being created at the same level. This is perhaps an old man's bias, but I feel that most of the work that you'll find on the front door of the iTunes Music Store is largely disposable. And even if it wasn't, for some reason, because I can't touch it, I can't feel it, it doesn't really move me in the same way.

It goes without saying at this point that the internet has largely destroyed the record industry. It's an ironic fact that the advent of digital compact discs in the late 80s, to some extent as a means to re-sell the very same recordings to people, were in effect the beginning of the end. This media enabled, within roughly 15 years time, users to digitize their entire music collections on their home PCs and upload them to the internet. The rest, as they say, is history.

// THE DEATH OF THE PHYSICAL

the death of one medium
in favor of another
leaves in it's wake
an absence

of culture, artistry, or an element
of our humanity, which goes largely
unnoticed
until it's too late

a history of media

While there is no way to undo the mess brought on us by 'innovation', it is up to the artists to carry the torch for what we've lost, and to remind those who will listen that it doesn't have to be this way.

The death of the LP record and cassette tape in favor of digital technology has been one of those seismic shifts, which came and went with nothing more than

a relative whisper on the landscape of human consciousness.

We heard about Napster, and then Metallica's drummer got pissed off, and then every teenager on the internet decided Metallica were irrelevant anyway. But I think there was larger story at hand most of us missed.

The shift from physical media to digital, in essence robbed us of a means of enjoyment that previously brought people together, in favor of one which prefers to keep us separate.

// THE DEATH OF THE PHYSICAL

This can be seen in the big picture by the fact that we've moved from mass mediated culture which preferred a few artists at the top of the food chain, to the model we have post-internet, where tastes are so fractured it's hard to commune with others around popular songs in the same way as before.

But on a purely physical level, we used to listen to records-physical records- in groups- at parties, at clubs, in your living room-it was a social event that could bring your family together, and yes, they sounded different, too-more bass, better equipment, physical, electric, magnetic. Bands used to spend years working on a record. It's hard to imagine anyone today tripping on acid for the first time to an MP3. We mostly use them in order to go jogging, or to tune out the blabbermouth in your office one cubicle over.

Tell me, when was the last time you felt excited about downloading a song? When was the last time you listened to music -let alone danced-with your friends? Or even played an album side in it's entirety? Does anyone even know what that even is anymore? Hint: It's what a playlist used to be before they gave away all control of how musical works were bundled. A few years ago my son encountered an old Sony Walkman in our basement and inquired, "Dad, how many MP3s does that thing hold".

I love records and I love tapes. I still have all of mine from every chapter of my life. I love the fact that long after your MP3s are erased in some hard drive crash, mine will still play. Even the embarrassing shit I used to listen to in the 8th grade.




Various combinations of sliced and painted LP records, Sean Ross 2010

a history of media



// THE DEATH OF THE PHYSICAL



“As the older generations die, they take with them the knowledge of what was lost when the new technology arrived and only the sense of what was gained remains. It’s in this way that progress covers it’s tracks, perpetually refreshing the illusion that where we are is where we’re meant to be”...

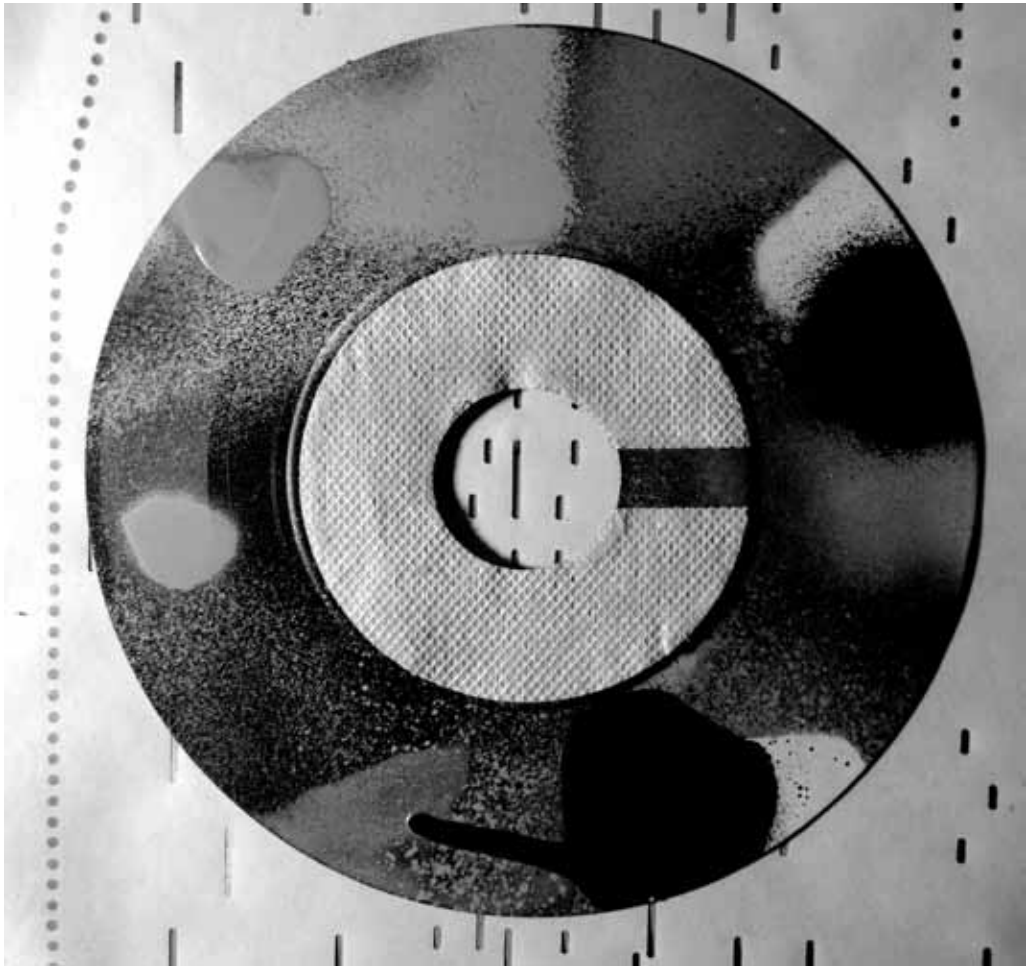
“We can no longer know what it was like when fire was the source of all light”

- Nicholas Carr, The Big Switch

“Braille” LP record spray painted in the rain, Sean Ross 2010





Sliced, Sean Ross, 2010











Mark Newstetter is my guitar teacher and much of my progress as a player in the past several years can be attributed to his unique talent. Confronted with the lack of high quality, comprehensive teaching materials in the field, Mark has spent a huge part of his career developing his own.

The guitar fretboard is a singularly strange place of secret handshakes and obtuse rules. In order to convey the complexities and nuances of this magical, yet daunting place, Mark has, over many years, written and designed his own set of books called the Fretography Series, which his students use exclusively, along with his tutelage, to unlock and master the instrument.

The reason why Mark is in this book isn't because he's a music person, although my thesis is full of music for it's own sake throughout.

Mark is a gifted musician and teacher, but he is also equally a designer, in the sense that every day people who are trying to accomplish things often must invent their own ways and means when there is nothing sufficient in existence. Building visual systems in order to explain and convey information is something designers do every day, but it is rare that the designer is also the carrier and curator of that information at such a granular level. My thesis is about the cross pollination and co-existence of visual language and sound. Mark Newstetter has dedicated his life to understanding and developing a unique body of knowledge in a highly practical application of this relationship.



I was drawn to the guitar at a very young age. I was 9 years old when I got my first guitar and I remember wanting one for years before that. I loved the sound of the guitar and I was also obsessed with art and drawing and painting, so I've always balanced the two in my life. Finding a way to bring the visual and the musical worlds together has led me to finding ways to express musical ideas on the guitar through graphics in a way that walks that balance between them. A lot of the educational materials are very academic and I think that if you want to really understand how music works and you don't want a real rudimentary kind of text you often have to go for really academic, very dry kind of materials, and if you don't want that then often the other alternatives are very simplistic and dumbed down. I'm trying to find something in-between. I think in order to do that, I had to find a visual language for basic theory and I wasn't satisfied with the visual language I saw in most materials that I've come across.

That's traditional notation, right?

Well, not just traditional notation, but the guitar, because you mentioned the grid before, the guitar is a grid inherently, and diagramming what goes on with the fretboard, that's also a traditional part of guitar pedagogy: diagrams. Most of the diagrams that you find, you know, they're clear enough in what they show you, but it's what they choose to show that I've always had a problem with. They don't show how theory applies to the fretboard—they'll show you a diagram

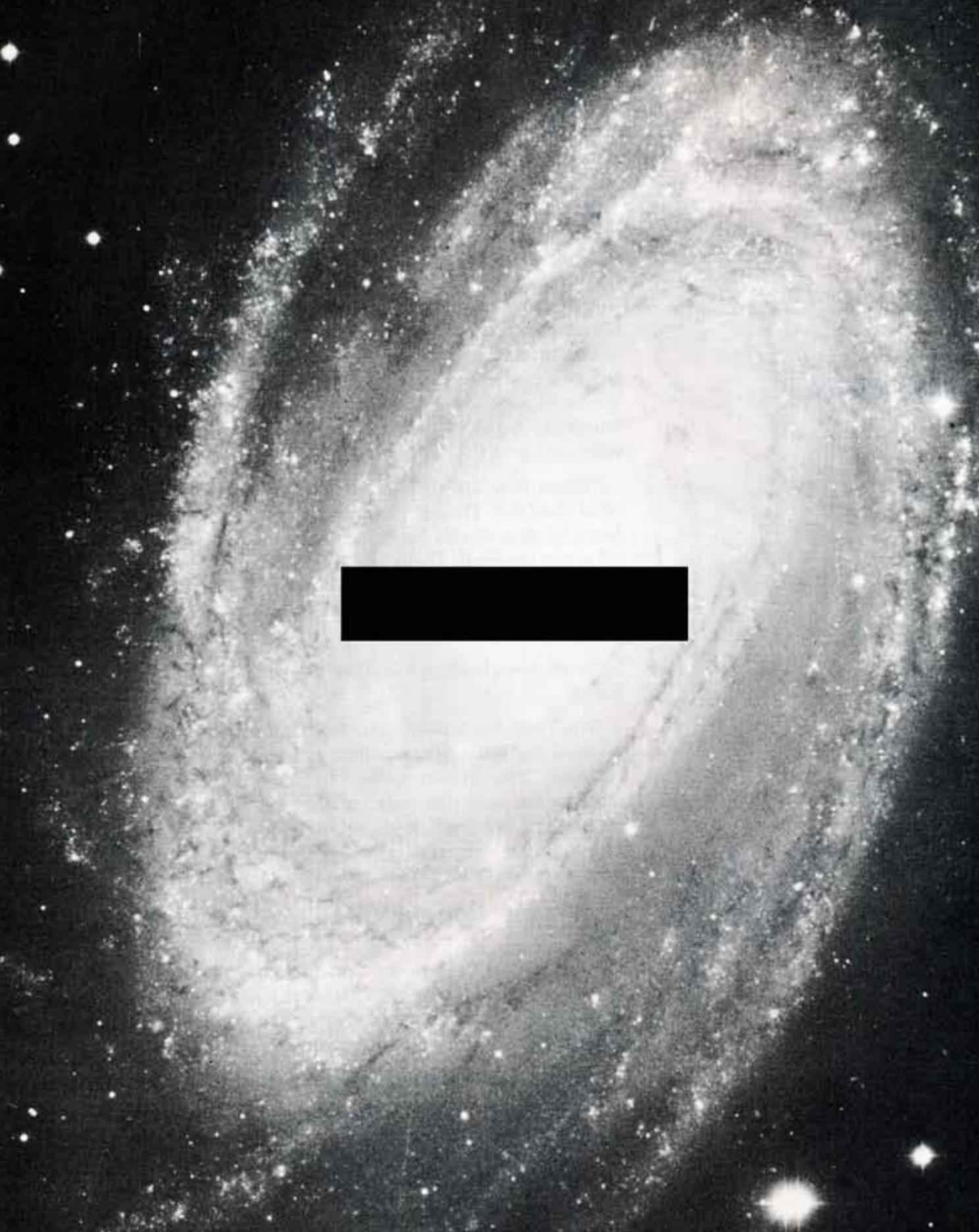
of a chord, a diagram of the scale. I haven't been able to find a comprehensive set of diagrammatical material for the guitar that tied together the theoretical ideas on the fretboard in a comprehensive way, meaning that you can look at the diagrams and understand the theory behind the music, behind what you're looking at, not just rote memorization of particular chords and scale forms.

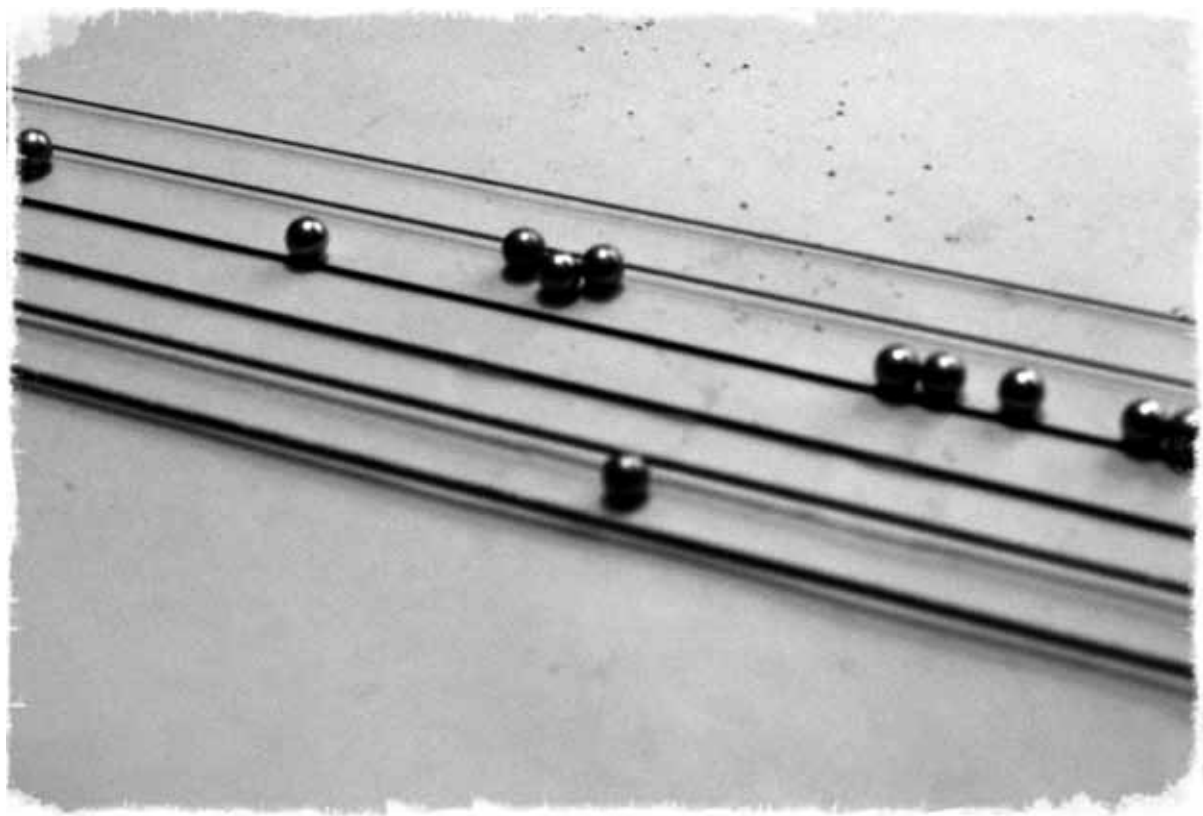
So, traditional music education limits the amount of information that a new student has access to, so as to intentionally not overwhelm them, but you're saying that it holds the new student back.



It does. They're not getting the full picture—they're just getting dribs and drabs and trickles, so without the ability to make those connections from all those disparate pieces, they're not really going to learn the full picture until much later. They've taken a piecemeal approach to understanding music, and in doing so it's like treating music as a jigsaw puzzle that you have to be a rocket scientist to be able

to put together. It's like a jigsaw puzzle with a bunch of shapes, and you don't know what the finished picture is supposed to look like. That's the way a lot of approaches work, I think. It's another piece, and putting them together isn't possible because every piece of music is different and there's so many different kinds of music that they don't even bother, it's like, we're not even gonna go there, we're not even going to show you how to put these pieces together because we don't think it can be done. I don't think I've ever





read those exact words anywhere, but that's the impression that I get from most of the elementary theory books and most of the guitar methods that I've seen, where theory is treated as a kind of really advanced thing that, you know, let's avoid this for now, you'll figure it out later, or you have to take a college class. I don't think that's right. I understood theory a long time ago, and I took music in grade school. We had a good music program in the public school I went to in New York as a kid, and I was in the school orchestra, and I took some music theory at UCLA extension when I was in my early 20s, and I've hung around with a lot of knowledgeable musicians and had lots of conversations and I read a lot and I understood how music theory worked, how notation worked, and all that. The guitar itself is an instrument, is notoriously sort of convoluted in the way notes and scales and chords lay out on the fretboard because of

the number of repetitions, the number of unisons, in other words, the same C can be played in 3 or 4 different parts of the fretboard; how do you decide where to play the same note, when you have all these choices? So a lot of times that is a beguiling, not beguiling but bewildering.

The relationships of those shapes, too, are different.

Right, it's not really consistent.

Like, the piano, repeats the same form over and over again, all you really need to do is really learn that one form.

Yeah, and the guitar has that going on too but it's also layered, you know, there's like 3 different forms.

And it's not so symmetrical. I mean of course you know that it is, but to a beginner, it doesn't appear to be.

It doesn't appear to be symmetrical.

It's hard to unlock the symmetry without some guidance.

The symmetry is there, but it has been overlooked. This is my premise. The symmetry on the fretboard has been overlooked. It's obscure but it's there, and if you know what kind of filter to apply, if you know where the middle is, if you figure that out, then you'll see it. And in fact there's more than one center, there's 2 basic symmetrical levels going on, or forms going on on the fretboard - a lower and an upper symmetry, and they're rotational symmetry.

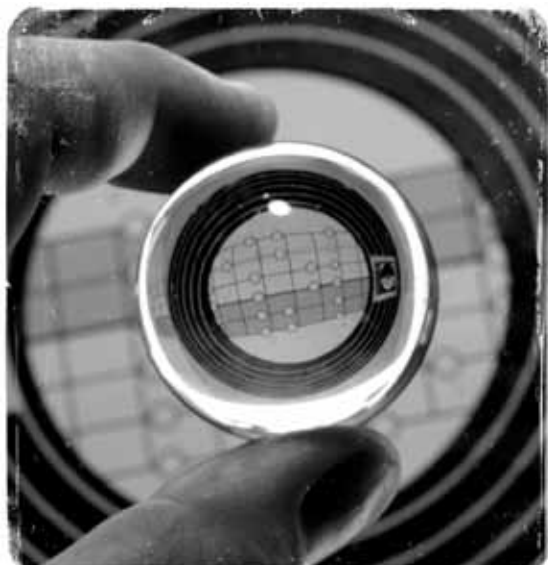
When I talk about symmetry on the fretboard I have to make it clear that it's not mirror symmetry, but rotational symmetry, which is like a radial kind of symmetry, where one arm goes up on the left, the other one goes down on the right, like a swastika, a rotationally symmetrical form, it's not a mirror image. A spiral galaxy is the metaphor I use, I think it's better than swastika. But swastika's an ancient Hindu symbol, which the Nazi's co-opted. It's a fascinating story in itself, the history of Aryanism, because the Aryans believed, the German Aryans, the Nazis, believed that it was the Aryans who came from Germany and went to India in ancient times that brought them all their culture, and then they died out and were destroyed, and so Hindu culture is actually built by Norse Germans who went there. Anyway, another story. So, that's why they use that symbol, that's why it's associated with both.

It's also in the Navajo religion.

Yeah, that's interesting, because it's a powerful image. It's like a yin-yang symbol, it spins. And that's what's going on with the guitar fretboard, it spins, it's not static, and when you realize that's how the symmetry is, if you don't have that, then it's hard to do anything but

take a piecemeal approach with a bunch of separate pieces of the puzzle that you're not ever gonna be able to see how they fit together. If you have that, that's the grid. The grid is like relativity, you can map it as a square grid, but it also curves, and if you know where the curves are, if you know how to follow them, then it's a lot more fun, it's a lot easier. I bring that into my method and that's the basis of the visual language that I have in my system. That's what I needed actually to start doing these things. I was looking for that and when I found it, I realized that's the basis for the entire visual language. If you don't have that, you don't have the grammar necessary, and so that's why I focus on modes, because modes are a really good illustration. For instance, the Ionian mode which is what we call the major scale is actually the inverse of the Phrygian mode, which is the third mode, so the first mode in the diatonic system is: whole step whole step half step whole whole whole half, and the third mode is: half whole whole whole, half whole whole, which is exactly the opposite.

And so there are seven modes, and so one and three are paired like that in a symmetrical, actually a mirror image; and the fourth and the seventh modes are paired, and the fifth and



the sixth mode are paired, and the second mode is it's own symmetrical pattern. So there's actually three pairs of modes, and one mode that forms it's own mirror image, basically. Now, I haven't seen that anywhere, explained that way. To me, that's an indispensable piece of information, and so it's a key part of my method, and modes are another one of those things that's treated as this kind of advanced subject that you really have to be an expert to get what modes even are, and I think that's backwards. I think you should understand modes early on in learning about music, it's a really important element. It's not that complicated. If you don't look at it the right way, it gets more complicated, if you look at it the right way, it's simpler.

Do you think that your method is faster as a result of that? Or do you think it requires the same amount of time?

No, I think it's faster. I think that students that I've had learn to play more complex music sooner than they would, I guess what I'd call, the old fashioned way. I've had students who've come to me after having had other teachers and have told me as much, that their teacher had them playing, you know, three chords for weeks and weeks, and I had them playing you know, scales all over the fretboard and double stops and actually fewer chords, at first—but you know, if you learn the piano, the first thing you do is not play a bunch of chords, the first thing you do is play scales, and double stops, two notes at a time, and then you play three note chords, and then four note chords. That's how I approach the guitar, and that's another element of my system.

Because if you don't have the foundation, chords are actually really hard to remember because you don't really understand the underlying logic of

how they're constructed.

Exactly, you build them note by note. So rather than throw simple chords at people who are starting out, they say OK, we'll get to the theory later, this way you can play Puff the Magic Dragon.

I think that's the key, that's the orientation behind a lot of guitar education, is the presupposition that they're not really going to follow through or get good, and so to teach them Puff the Magic Dragon is enough.

Yeah, I think the problem is the teachers who approach it that way are afraid that if they don't show their students what they define as progress, which is, you can play a song on the second week, ok, you can play a song on the second week but you won't know what you're playing, you won't know the names of any of the notes, and you won't be able to play another song for a month or longer and you may not even remember it long term, because you're not learning the language and you won't know how to describe even to yourself what you're doing. So I take a different approach. I would rather people learn how to play scales on the first lessons, play double stops, and scales, and on the second lesson play a few chords, not even get to a song maybe til the third lesson, and it's basically a twelve bar blues, or a three chord song in the key of A which is easy enough, but before they do that they're learning scales and double stops and they're understanding the theory so that when they start to learn these songs they learn them, they have an awareness of what they're doing and it makes it easier for them to learn subsequently.

It's also giving them a lot of simple tools to be able to play with and to make their own expressive music right away, and I think that's ultimately

what a lot of people want to do, but a lot of people don't get that opportunity to do that until they've been playing other people's tunes. I know a lot of players who are really gifted musicians but they learned that way and as a result they can play other people's music really well but they haven't developed their own unique voice with the instrument, and so I think those rudiments are really valuable and give people the ability to figure out who they are as a player from the outset.

That's a very good point. People understand the instrument and they understand music, then they'll be playing the instrument and they'll be playing music. If people learn to play a song, then they know a song. I would rather learn music and play the instrument then play a song. And

so one of the things that reinforces that standard method is partly that there hasn't been a reason to change it, because theory is still perceived as such a complicated academic subject on the guitar that you have to be Segovia to even scratch the surface of it, and to me that's a mistake and I've always thought so. I've spent a lot of time and energy and thought trying to figure out how am I going to solve that problem, and I believe that I've effectively solved it.

So you are very gifted in pattern recognition. Marshall McLuhan was that way too.

I wanted to talk a bit about your take on playback media, you being a bit of an older gentleman who has seen the times shifting; one of the things I'm looking at is the fact that vinyl media, cassette media





isn't dead.

I hope cassette media is dead. Cassettes suck!

It's not. There are entire music scenes that only deal in tapes.

Vinyl is great, CDs are ok. I'd rather have a CD than a cassette any day. Cassettes suck.

How important do you think packaging is?

Packaging? Well, I mean, I grew up dreaming of having my own 12 inch album, you know, at some point.

Have you ever cut a record?

Yeah, I've cut records, not my own private album. I was in a band and we put out a single, and I was on other people's albums.

I've been doing lathe cutting. It's an aspect to what I'm doing, forward facing innovative, lathe cut one off records. Have you ever heard of Blurb? My idea is to allow people to do one-off records; taking the idea

of a mass-produced product, and making it a very personal product. It could be a valentine, crickets, their mom, whatever people want to archive. We're living in a digital age where data is ephemeral, we're putting all this stuff in the cloud, but we don't have the same relationship with the cloud as we do with physical objects. I think what's missing is the ability to touch something, to hang it on your wall.

Definitely. I think that time has shown that old mediums don't disappear, they take on a different role. Like photography for instance, I was talking to somebody else about this not long ago, what's now called conventional photography, paper and film photography, is now going to be sort of like letterpress and book binding, it's going to become a craft for an elite percentage of the population, and so it'll never go away because it will always be an art form. People still use oil paints, people still play violins and pianos and acoustic guitars. There was a point where people were saying that acoustic guitars were going to disappear because everyone's going to play electric,

and synthesizers are going to replace everything, and it hasn't happened because you can't replace the experience of playing a physical wood instrument with strings that vibrate with an electronic device, it's not the same thing and it never will be. People were predicting the end of movies when television came along. Now people are predicting the end of television because of the internet. But I think all of that stuff will still be around.

But the recording industry really has died.

Well, industries are basically set up to capitalize on things that people do or need, and the things that people do or need don't necessarily disappear when the industry dies. And I think making music on a professional level used to be much more expensive because you had to put together a demo, record a demo, you'd have to buy a reel of tape which was a couple hundred dollars, a new reel was a few hundred bucks maybe; you'd have to pay a real knowledgeable experienced engineer to use a studio which cost many many thousands of dollars, and then you had to pay for each copy

of everything that you did, and then you had to mail everything and cover letters and pay a photographer to do 8x10s and whatever else you needed and your chances of making money as a result of all that investment of time energy and money was infinitesimal. Well, your chances of making money now are probably no better, maybe worse, but it costs a lot less to do it now, it costs next to nothing now.

Well, now there's this idea of the long tail, which says that you could do something like your book, and you don't have to sell a million copies, all you have to do is sell however much is cost you to make it, and anything after that is gravy, and you'll be alive long enough to reap the benefits of doing it.

I think that for all of the bitching about how hard it is to make any money as a musician now because of the internet, frankly I think it's actually no harder to make money now as a musician for most people because it was always impossible. It's a myth that there used to be a time when you could make a living. There was never a time when you could make a living as a musician.





Musicians have always been preyed upon, and the old model was, unless you were David Bowie or Rick Springfield or whoever was being played on the radio, you'd have no chance because the whole industry was based on the Hit.

Exactly, a few people could make a fortune, and everyone else was just starving, struggling to get by, making next to nothing, playing gigs for very little money. It's academic whether it's harder to make a living now. It probably is harder on just a grassroots level because there are fewer clubs that pay money. But there never were that many. So the difference is academic.

I guess what I'm looking at is the recorded artifact. There's a lot of artists who don't even play live,

who don't even want to play live, but their whole thing is making art in that media, and without that physical artifact, people are not willing to buy it.

Right. Exactly. People assume now everything comes for free. You give away your work for free, and you're supposed to make money how? Playing concerts?

But unless they're a live player, they're never going to see that pay-back.

Only a small percentage of musicians can organize a paying tour. The cost of going out on tour for most people and playing clubs and stuff like that is prohibitive. You're never going to make a living that way. Very few people make a living that way. So to say that you give away your music on the internet for free to get people to come to your shows, it's not a sustainable business model.

That's what I'm saying, that's what I'm looking at.

Unless you're big enough that you can charge a hundred dollars a ticket. But if you're just a regular band, you can't do that. And the club gets a big percentage of it, you get very little else of what it costs you to maintain your equipment, to pay for gas, just eat.

Part of my thesis is that the physical artefact needs to come back into play in order to solve that.



OLDIES

PARTY 'TIL
COLPIX YOU'RE BROKE



date

BUT

Brunswick

RECORDED LIVE

Kay-Gee's

TAMLA

ROULETTE

GOODIES

Chi-Lites

PABLO

LONDON
Spring
RECORDS

THE BUILDING OF THE WALL

Phil Spector

Galaxy

Atlantic

A ⚡



T
NECK

DJ

Capitol

SLY KOOL

WIN

The TNECK
Silver Spotlight

MODERN RECORDS
JAZZ SURPRISE

SHAKE



pickwick 33

33 1/3 RPM

WARD

COLE
REGISTERED • MADE BY TONAL RECORDS

Horizon

TWIST








I travel the
w o r l d
and the
seven seas

e v e r y b o d y
is looking for
something

A black and white photograph showing a close-up of a vinyl record on the left, with its grooves clearly visible. To the right, a portion of a light-colored, textured hat, possibly a fedora, is visible. The background is dark and out of focus.

" We've had years of evolution to develop this incredibly fine set of muscles, which can do the most extraordinary, delicate things and which have their own memories and so on. And then we discard it all; it seems completely stupid to me."
—Brian Eno, on making music with computers

"Authentic creation has been replaced by selection from a menu."
—Lev Manovich, Language of New Media

// THESIS

My generation has witnessed firsthand the transition from the real to the virtual. Having close relationships with both old and new forms of media, I am in a unique position to be able to challenge some of the presumptions that newer technology makes; about human behavior, innovation, and the primacy of efficiency over all else. After many years of working with computers and their embedded logic, I have come to the conclusion that non-digital processes often produce more satisfying results. There are no shortcuts (or key commands) for creating compelling, original work.

The accompanying psychology of digital is one of endless malleability. Having access to this raw data at such a granular level affords us incredible new powers of control, however our sense of purpose and responsibility to the laws of nature all too frequently leave the equation altogether.

For the creator of media, digital tools provide limitless tweaking possibilities that can actually stifle mindful creativity. The all-pervasive “fix it in the mix” mentality actually prevents creative decisions from ever happening, instead more layers of complexity are added to an already hot mess.

I examine these issues through dual practices of aural and visual arts, with the same challenges existing in both places; the same tensions between intent and result, content and medium. My thesis attempts to combine two very different disciplines, as a vehicle for the rediscovery of pure analog sensation, and a realignment of the natural order of the senses that digital processes have disembodied.

Both analog and digital technologies store, transfer and play back information, but they do so in very different ways. An analog signal is a measured response to changes in physical phenomena, such as sound, light, temperature, or position, which is then transferred to electrical current. In the case of sound recording, fluctuations in air pressure are what microphones pick up and translate into electrical voltage. In order to play back the recorded sound, this voltage is then transferred to a speaker cone that vibrates in order to recreate the sound wave. The voltage or the current is said to be an “analog” of the sound, like a photograph is a reading (and subsequent display) of values in light. Similarly, materials such as ink bleed into paper, and are held there in a way that is different every time; a physical process and subsequent result that is intrinsically filled with simple magic.

investigations into form

Transference, Sean Ross, 2010

// THESIS



Using the turntable as a primitive drawing instrument, and the vinyl record as a method of printmaking (previous page) - notions of physicality, transfer, degradation, low and high-fidelity; the differences between asynchronous (digital) and analog signals and information.

Digital information is asynchronous; analog media is continuous. Digital bits can co-mingle and “re-mix” much easier than analog atoms can; the resulting temptation to manipulate this information in various ways is therefore severe. This is why we so often substitute an effect, or affectation, for substance and meaning. (See: AutoTune, Autotrace, the Andy Warhol filter in Photobooth, and countless other examples)

The mark on the page and analog signal both have a theoretically infinite resolution; in practice an analog signal is also subject to noise, or random variation. However, this noise is actually considered to be a desirable quality and can contribute aesthetically in a positive way; printmaking techniques impart unpredictable qualities that make the end result more “authentic” and hand made. Vinyl records and cassettes both impart unique and desirable qualities on the stored data that ultimately cannot be separated from the experience of its use.

Digital processes translate physical phenomena to a string of numbers, “sampling” at various intervals and throwing away information in the process. The common complaint of digital technology has been this loss of data, however it has become clear that quality is not necessarily as important to people as other attributes, such as the ability to instantly make “perfect” copies, transfer data over a network, and the convenience of portability. It should be quite clear at this point to anyone paying attention that we have traded in other significant values in our culture for these things.

Analog tools have a more intimate relationship with our bodies than computers do; I have become increasingly wary of how digital processes arrive too quickly at “solutions” to “problems.” We should therefore not be so quick to relegate any interest in past technologies, practices or tools as pure nostalgia, or the mere fetishization of bygone things that fall outside the current norms of modern life.

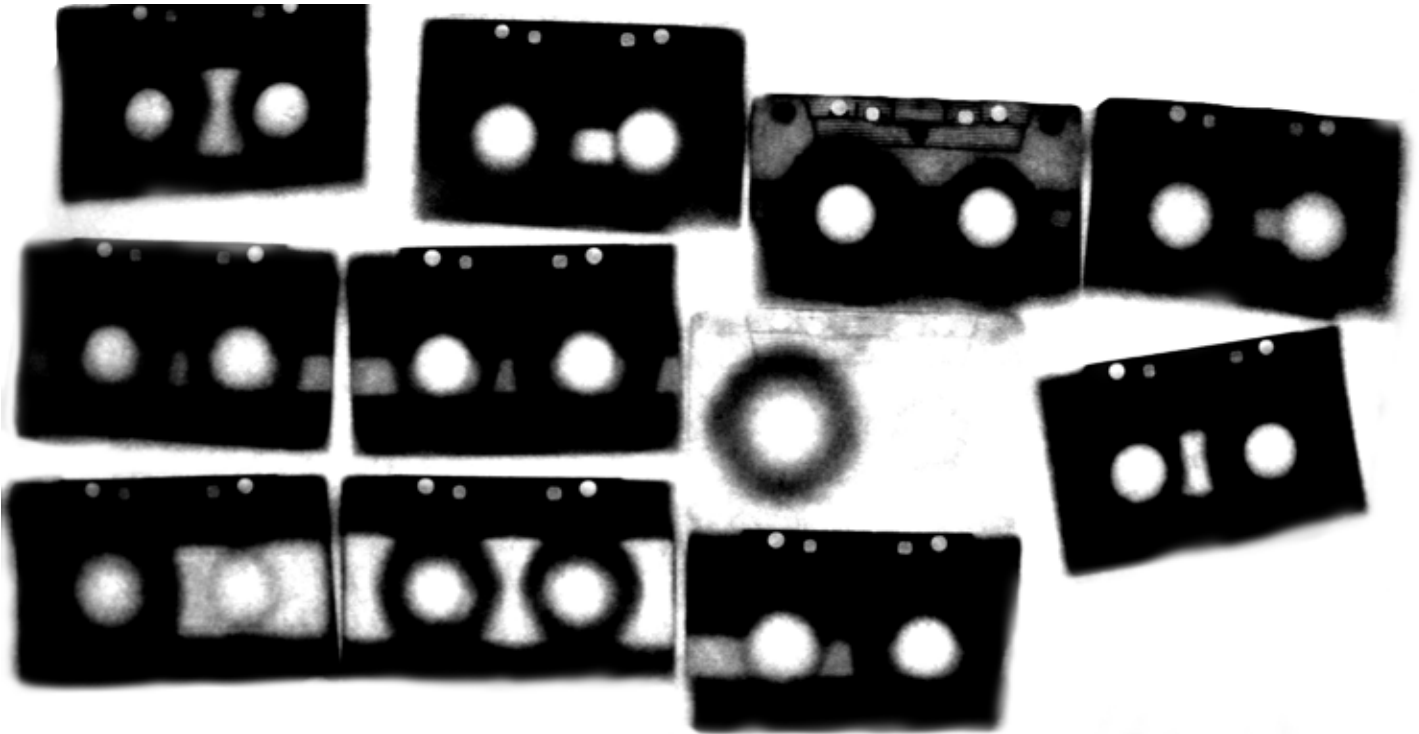
Have I then rejected, out of hand, all this newfangled digital technology? No. I do however increasingly relegate the computer to a position much later in my process, as a finishing tool, or as an organizer and compiler of information that has already been well thought through, without the aid of my fantastic number crunching assistant. I believe that processes that are slower or more laborious, limited, or time consuming can be not only more enjoyable—the results are often

// THESIS

richer, more nuanced and most importantly, human. I believe that once these results are combined with the more modern digital tools of today, we can create work which transcends the machines of any era altogether.

“Use mistakes as thy divine intention”, reads a card from Oblique Strategies, a card game designed by Brian Eno and Eric Schmidt in 1975 that provides a series of randomly chosen abstract ideas for unblocking creativity. One of the key challenges artists must confront is the tendency of computer applications to narrow known processes into a “use case”, predetermining what –and how– the workflow will occur; subsequently there is little potential for surprise or discovery.

In this overly app-ified world, analog processes have been distilled into algorithms which behave as we expect them to. Using “plug-ins,” we parse our creations through the filters of our choosing – the way a certain brand of analog camera film looks, the way analog tape sounds, a certain mode of sketching style, a brush or pattern – all code which is readily accessible to be applied to our stale digital work. These operations render the effect in the same way every time, never interacting with any other quality other than itself.



Cassette tapes are considered to be outdated media technology, however they have the unique advantage of still continuing to work long after their expiration date. Select cassettes from my personal archive of recorded musical works, Sean Ross, 2011.

investigations into form



Looking at gesture and the idea of the musical grid, i imagined the sounds in the spiral of the record to be shapes of the musical grid, a spiral as the mechanical means of creating a grid of time. Sean Ross, 2011

// THESIS



Minette's Readymade, Sean Ross, 2010

investigations into form

Many of my sound investigations used physical tape loops, a process whereby cassette tape is cut and reattached to itself in order to make a continuous cycle during playback.

It's physicality allowed me to slightly alter the quality of the playback by manipulating the tape with my fingers as it moved. This hand rendered process was imperfect and slightly unpredictable. The results were far more compelling than the strict accuracy of performing the same operation using a computer. Digital technology, with its unlimited "undo" seems to indicate that every move is a mistake to be fixed. These physical processes, because they are so much like our own physiological bodies, can have a soothing effect on us. They help us connect to it because they come directly from the actual conditions of life.

In my youth, I spent many late nights in my bedroom recording. Sometimes they were songs, sometimes just noise experiments, as much aural process drawings in their way than actual music. I relished in the experimentation. I found it fascinating the way music could become noise and noise could become music, and I loved to play those two opposites against one another. I was always interested in combining dualities of things, hard and soft, loud and quiet, ugly and beautiful. I also flourished in the simplicity and limitation of the 4-track machine, and it forced me to become an expert planner. I forged a powerful minimalist approach that often favored layering exact replicas of parts over each other, rather than more intricate and ornate variations. I appreciated making beautifully simple things larger, starker, and more defined over making things needlessly more complex. I also allowed my appreciation for noise making and simple pop structures to combine.

I have always approached music in a naive way, inspired by the ethos of punk, which intentionally avoided ability in favor of raw honesty. While I wasn't particularly drawn to the often violent and ugly rebelliousness of punk rock, I took from it the core concept of not letting virtuosity get in the way of invention.

It is extremely difficult if not impossible to learn anything without the narrowing of focus and limiting of creative options. Unfortunately, computer culture has largely eradicated these concepts from our environment, causing a hegemonic staleness to occur in everything computers touch, from design to art to music.

Computers seem to delay indefinitely the key moments in the creative process which allow for reflection and refinement. If a decision is never made, mistakes can never be learned from; subsequently criticality is never fully developed, a key component in arriving at a uniquely meaningful result.

There is a misguided notion that a performance or work can and should be created entirely within the user interface of an appropriately designed digital system. I am concerned that younger generations will ultimately never develop or make use of any other skills, choosing instead the path of least resistance: thinking, producing, and outputting, all from within similar if not identical hegemonized digital environments.

// THESIS

Digital culture has become dominant in such a relatively short period of time, driven largely by the incessant drive for growth that our capitalistic system demands of us, and not genuine human need.

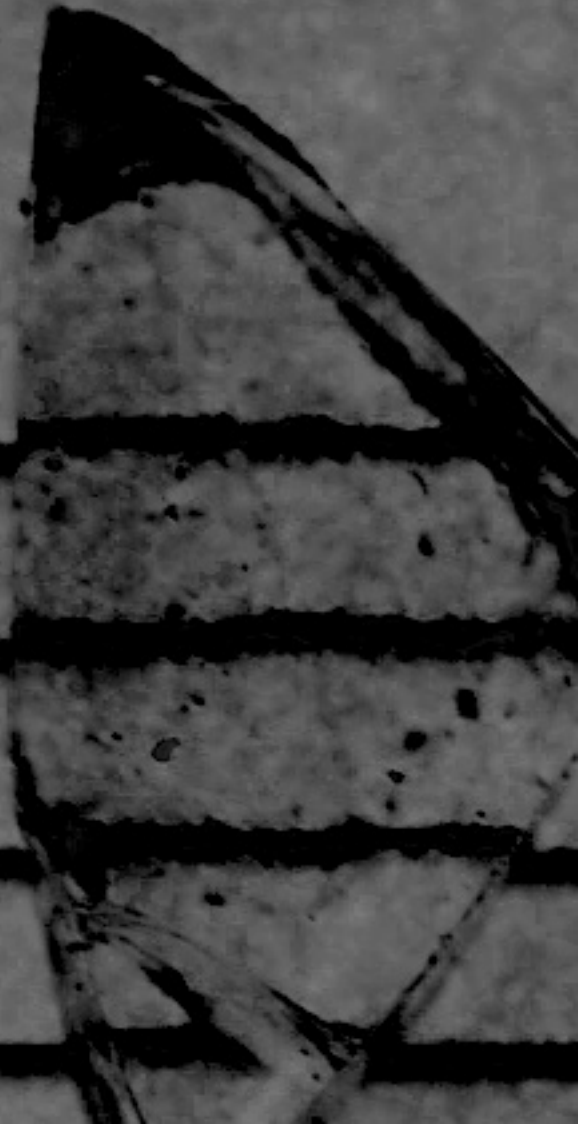
Now that information, art, music and entertainment are all designed, distributed and received via the same digital devices, might we at some point become over-saturated with virtual experiences, as everything blends together into a tasteless digital soup?

If so, will the pendulum swing back towards the material once again?

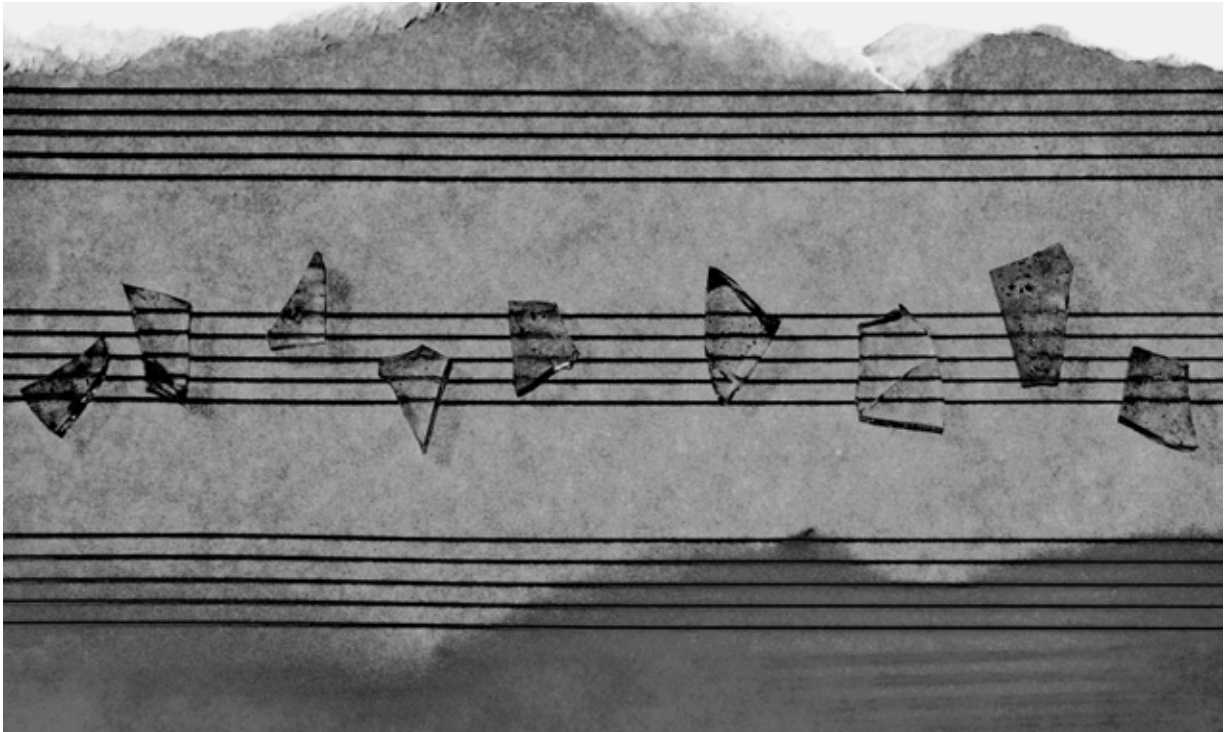
Or is there a middle way,

some place

in-between?



investigations into form



Experimental notation: broken glass on torn manuscript paper, Sean Ross, 2011

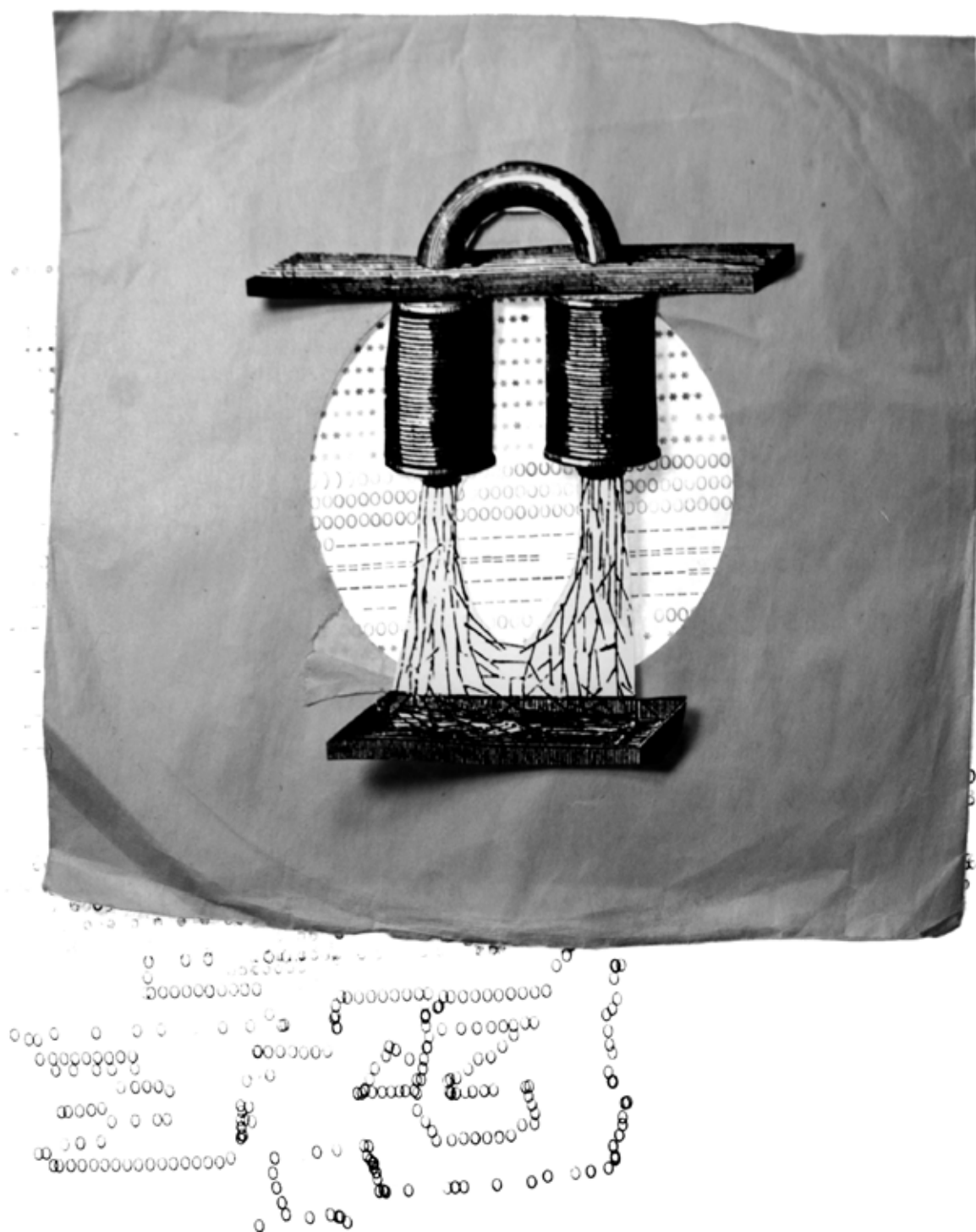
digital

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a s y n c h r o n o u s

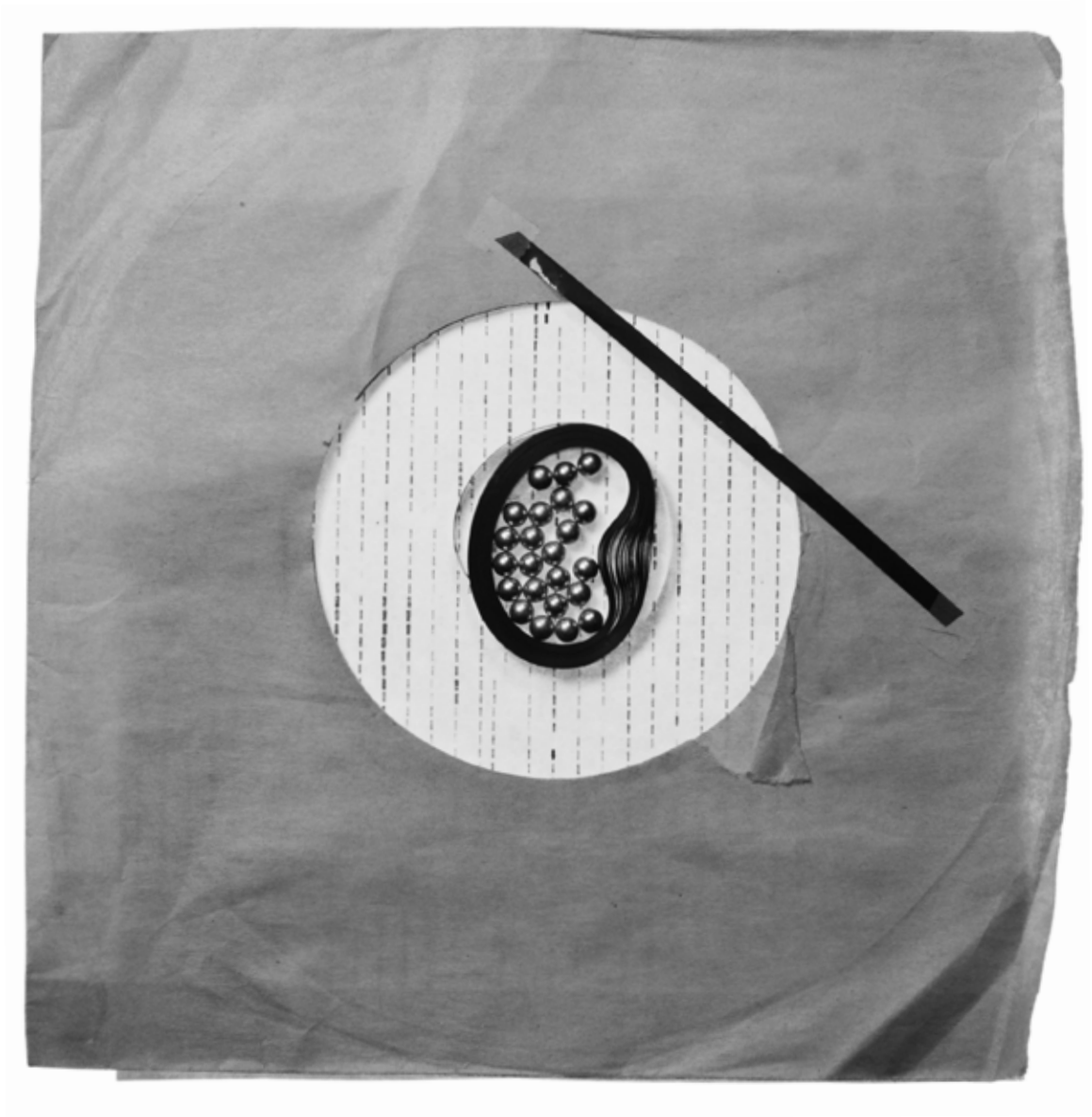
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lost forever

// THESIS

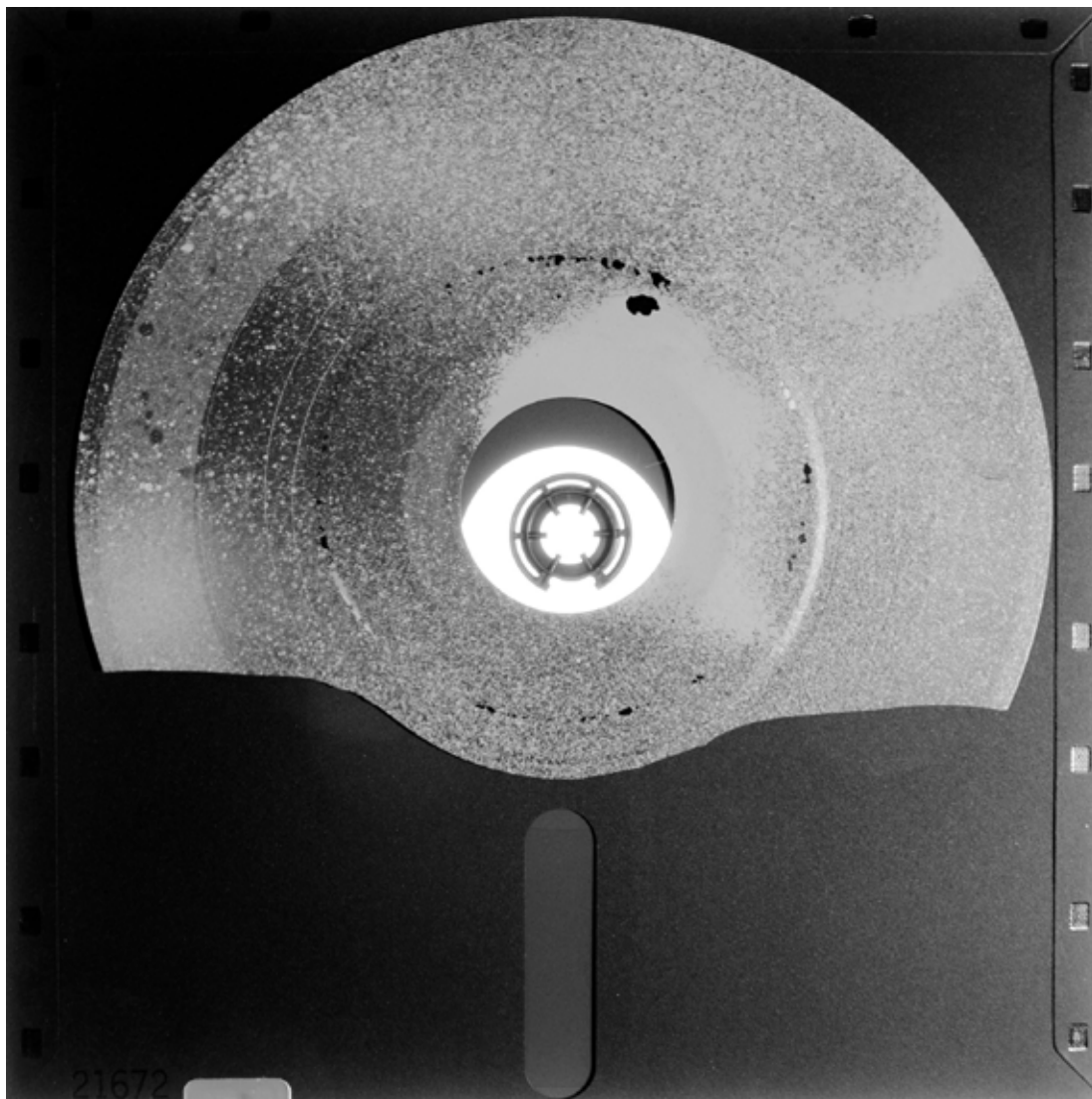


investigations into form



Media collages consisting of type studies using manual typewriter, cassette tape, and ephemera, Sean Ross, 2011

// THESIS



Collage consisting of: a broken 45 record from the 1950's, cassette tape reel from the 1970's, floppy diskette from the 1980's, Sean Ross, 2011

investigations into form



Disassembled cassette, marbles, torn paper, Sean Ross 2010

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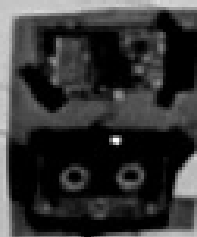
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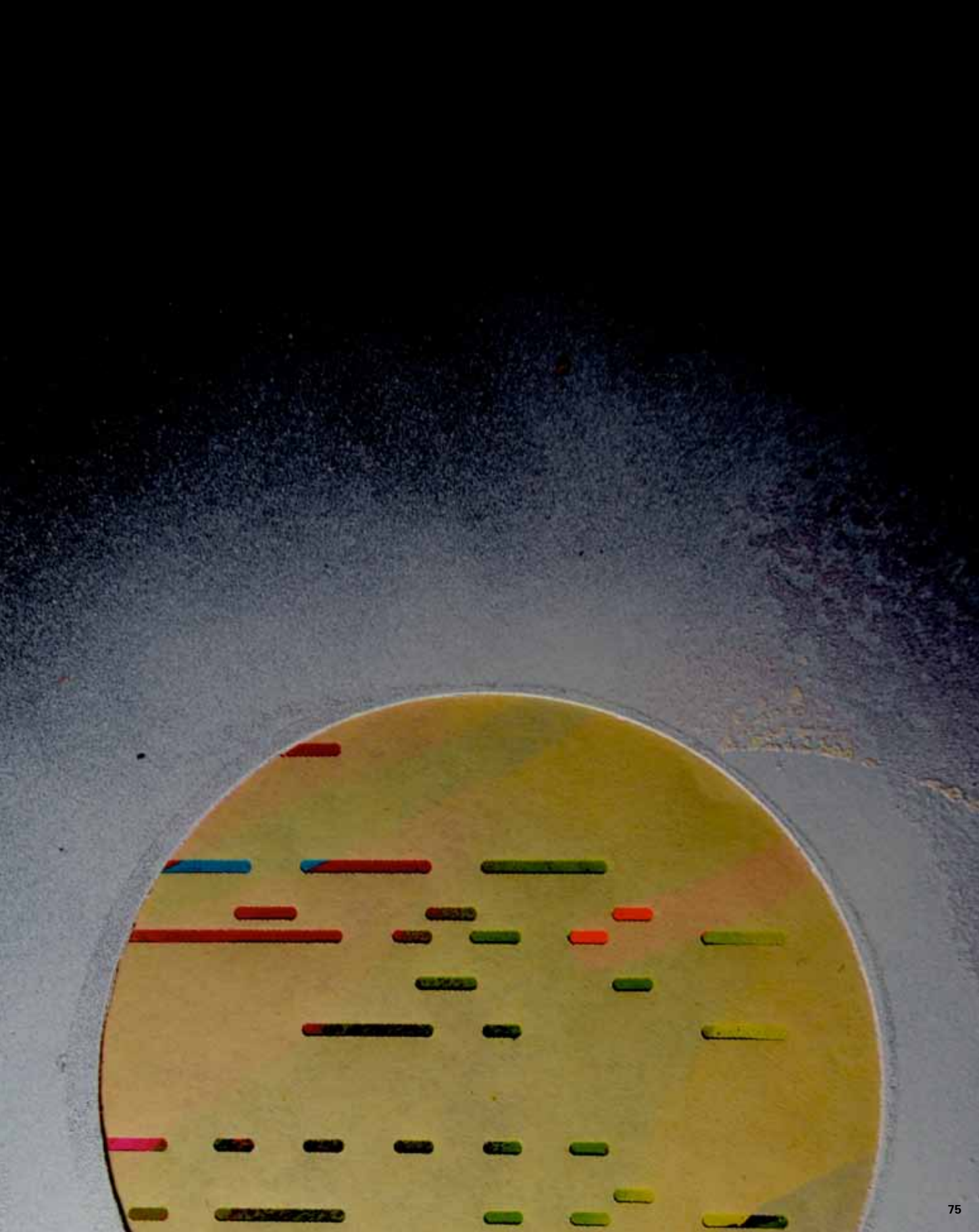
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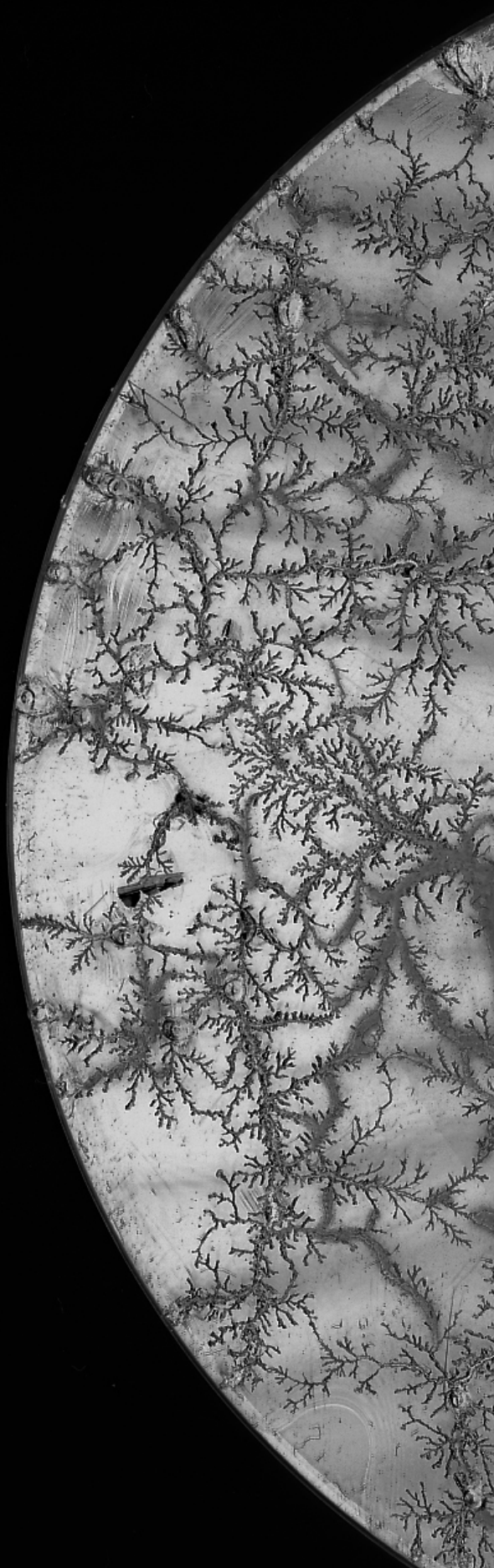
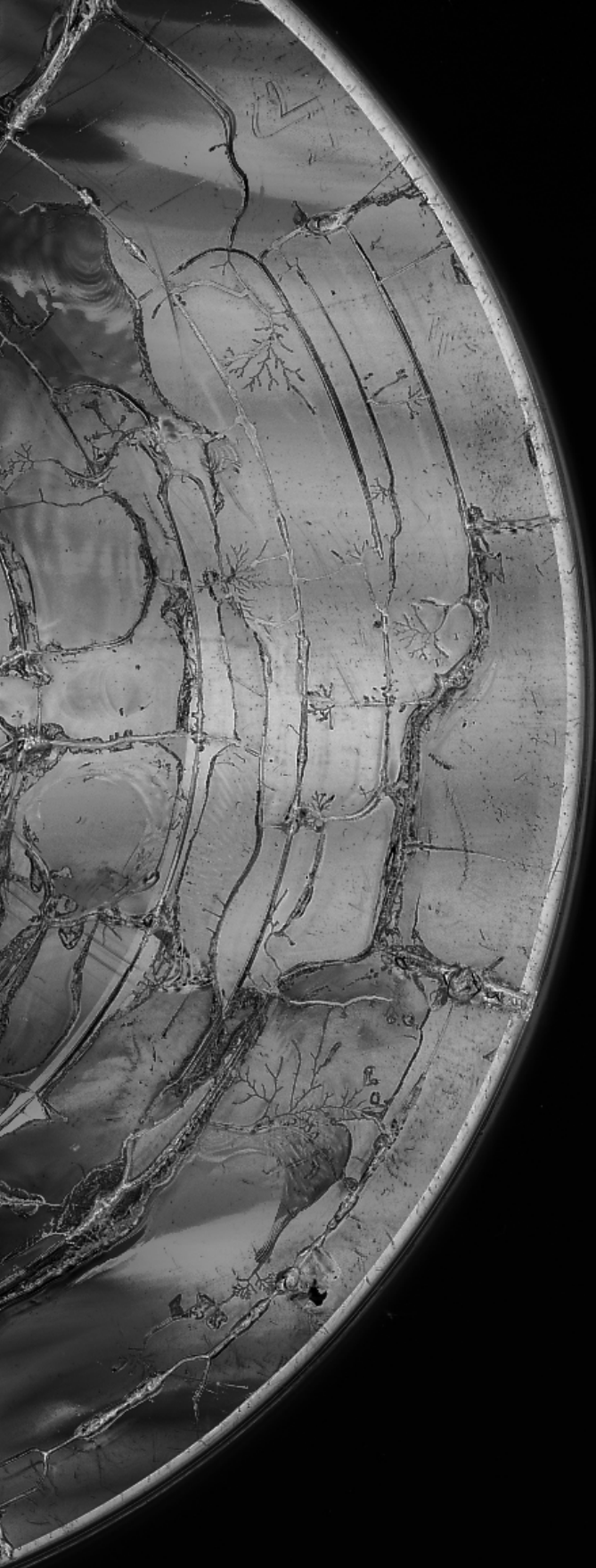
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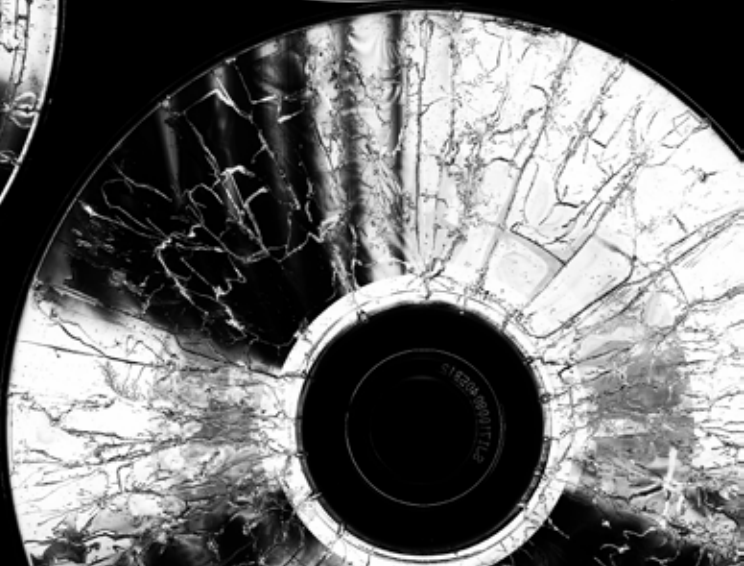
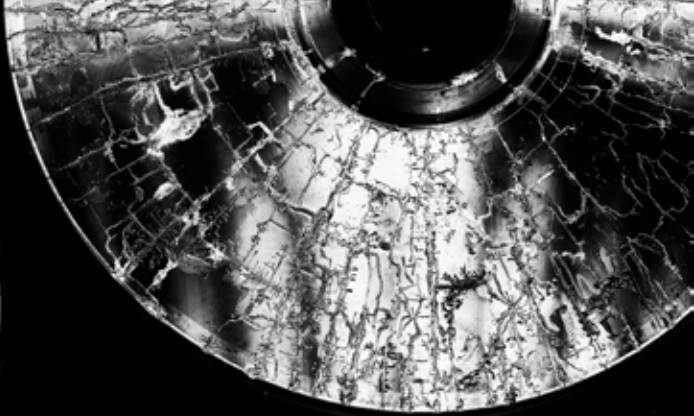
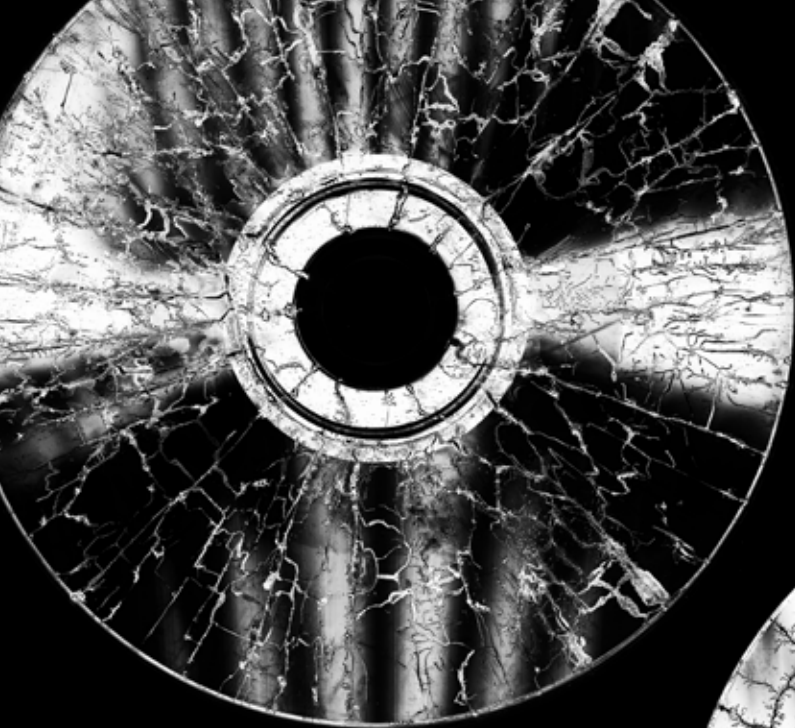




investigations into form



For the class Identity of Anonymous Space, I began cooking compact disks in the microwave, in order to visualize the patterns of EMFs. This act served a dual purpose, as I knew I wanted to investigate the fractured sounds of damaged technology, as well as find ways to create surfaces which embodied sound and image in new, experimental ways. Sean Ross, 2011





Opposite page: microwaved CDs. This page: jellybeans on spinning turntable, Sean Ross, 2011

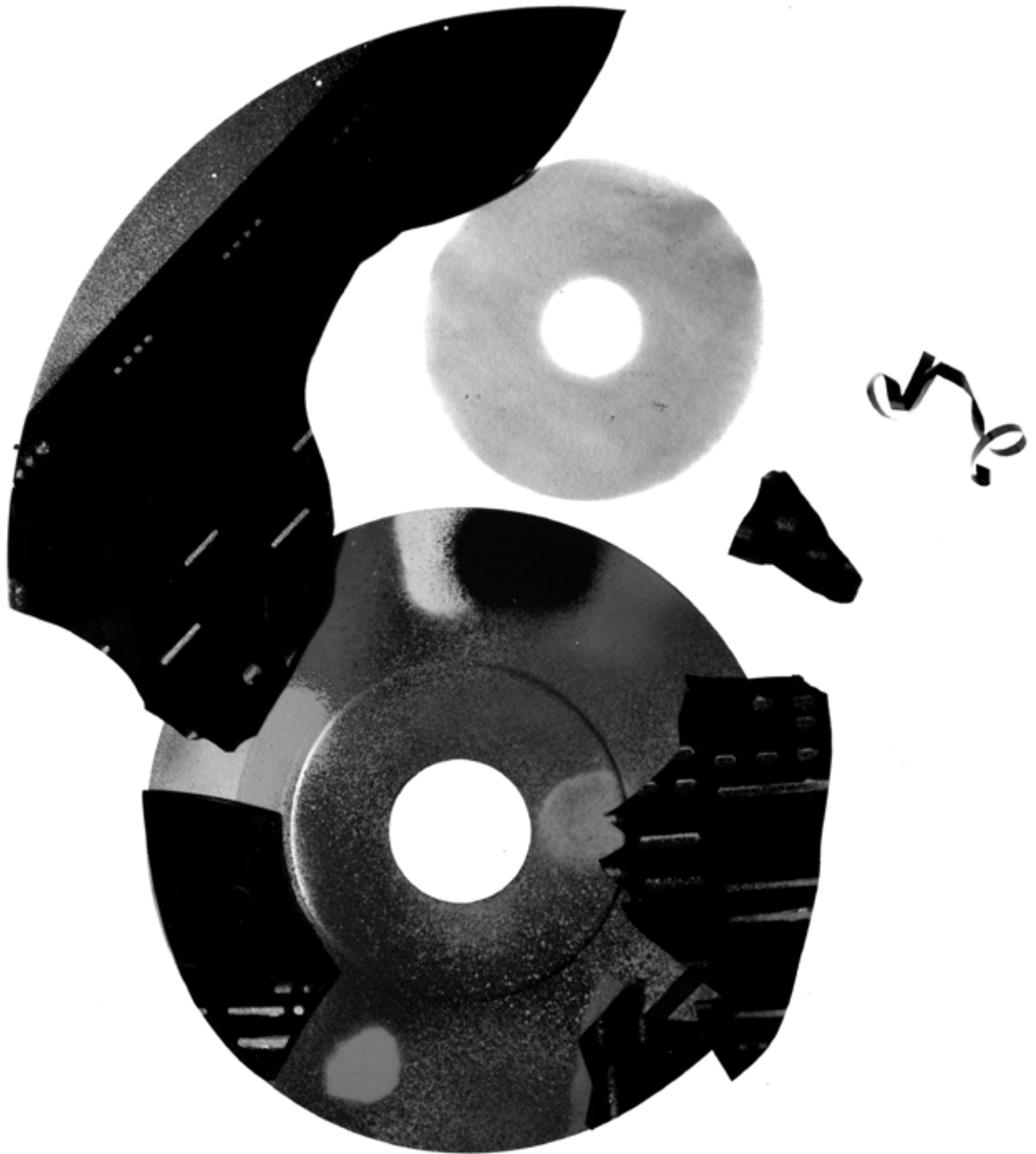
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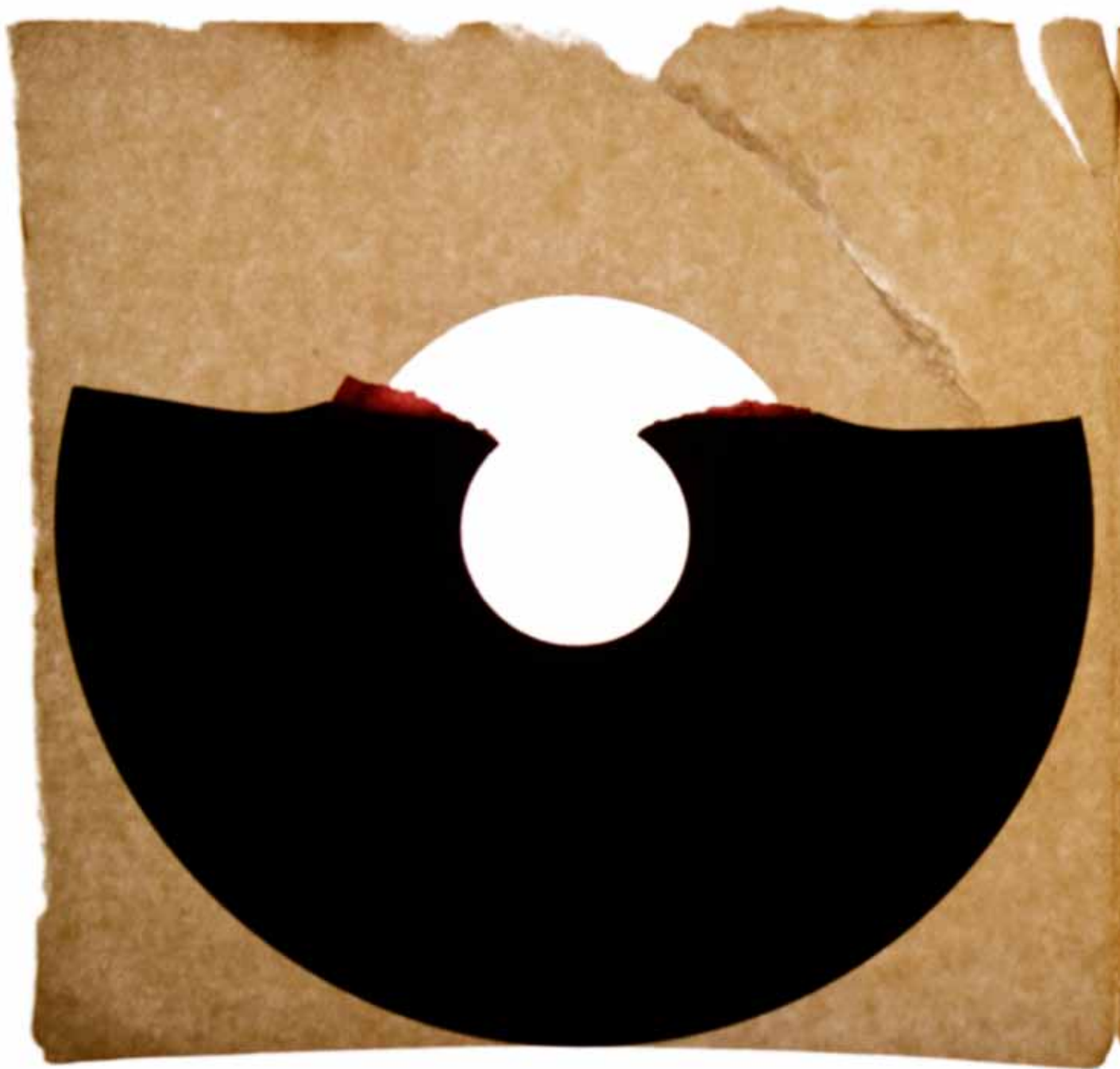
This page: cassette tape forms

Opposite page: Frankensteined media object: hard drive, cassette tape, vinyl 45 record, spray paint, Sean Ross, 2011

investigations into form

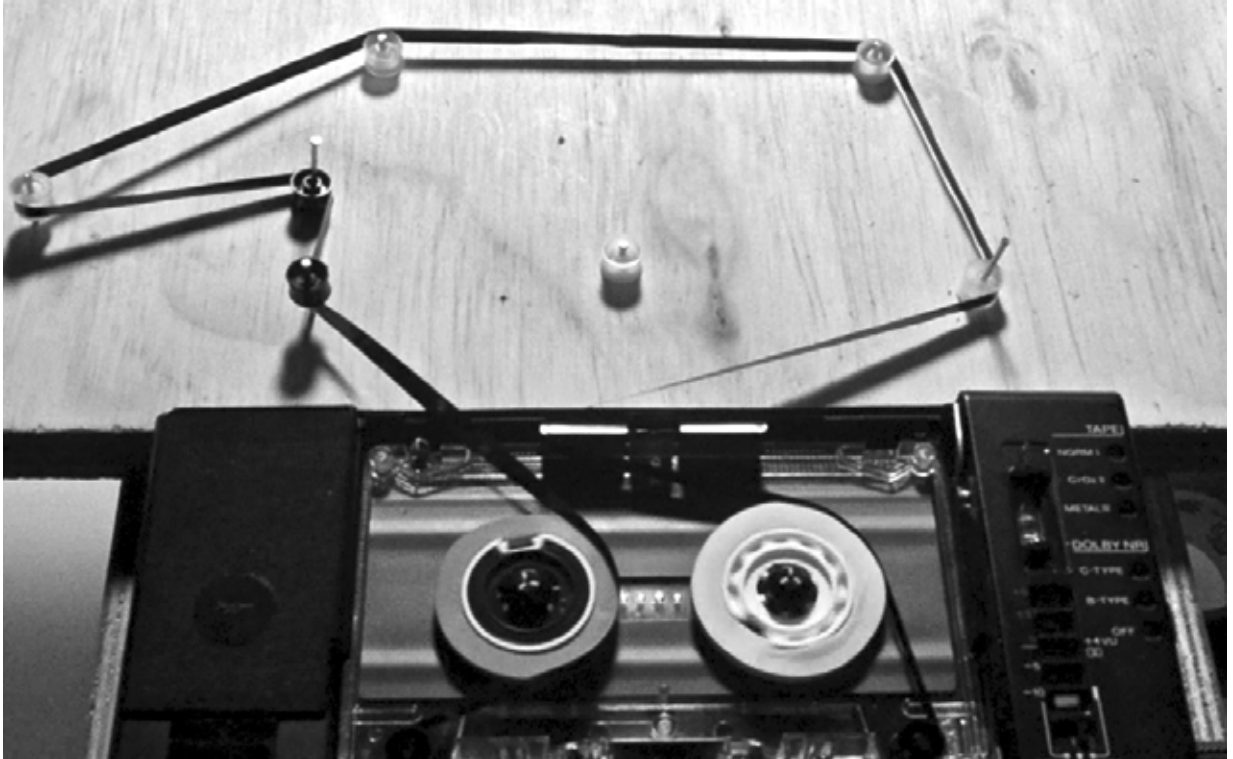


// THESIS



investigations into form





Media manipulations, Sean Ross, 2010-2011

video clip >> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P54AwaBbgol&feature=related>

video clip >> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtajjugsnP5>



t u n n e l



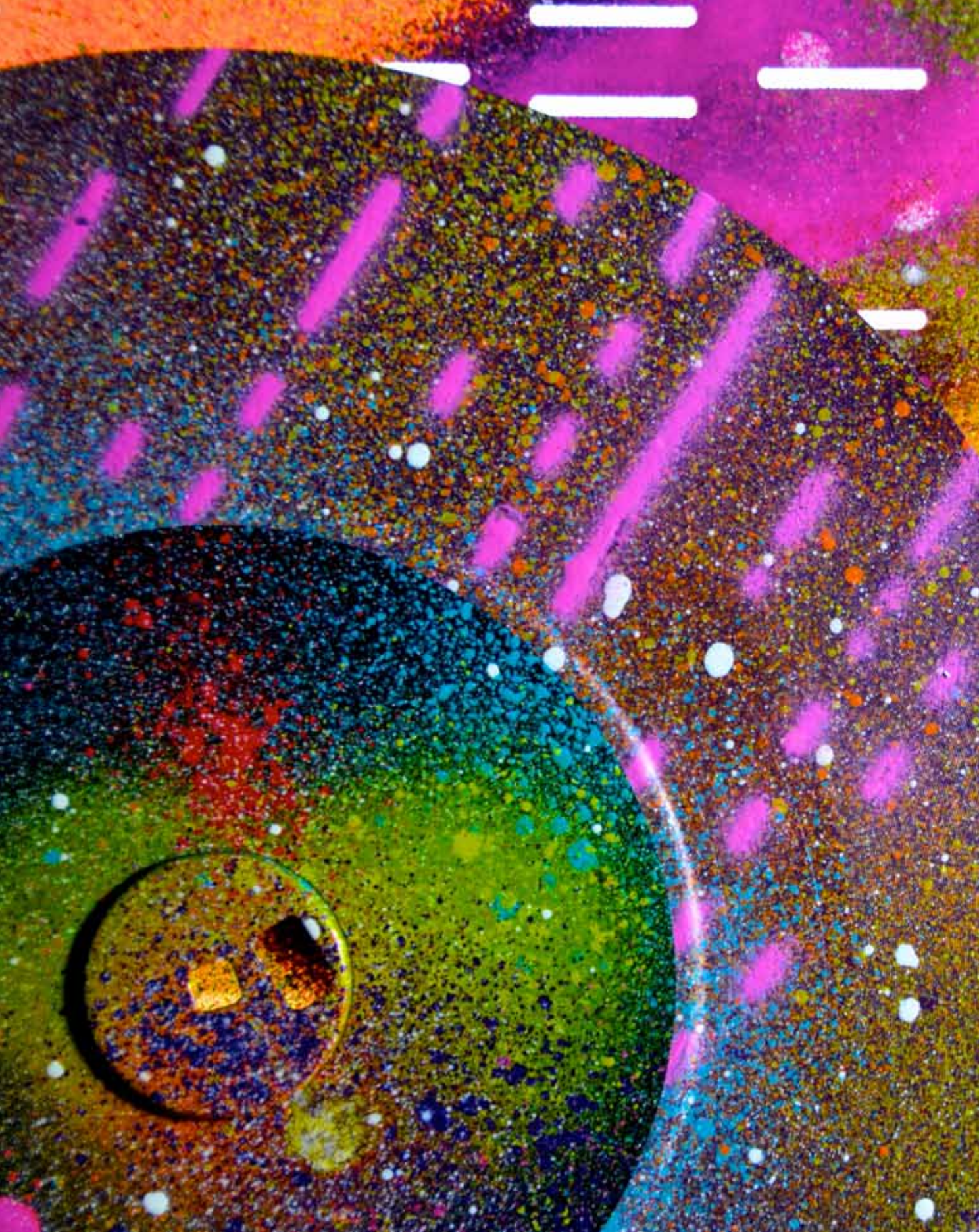
J A M

sound clip >> http://dsrstudio.com/tunnel_jams.zip



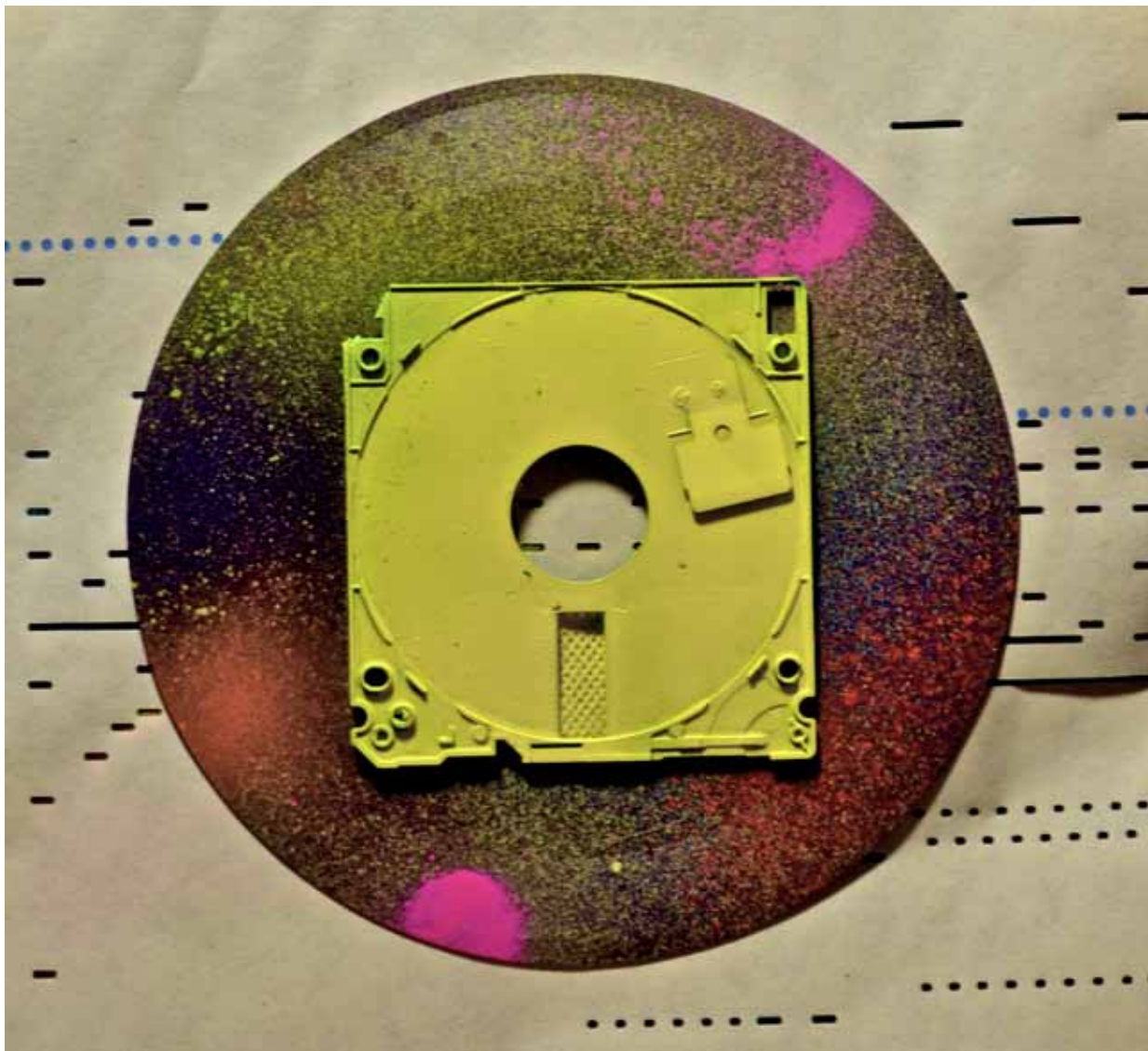
Tunnel jams were undertaken during the thesis semester in collaboration with Lara Manzanares, in order to explore physical space as a medium. Interactions between passerby and sound making were recorded in addition to recombining previously recorded vinyl on analog turntables and mixed with live instruments and improvisational performance. The results were then made into lathe-cut records, which are shown later in this book.







// THESIS



Media objects, Sean Ross, 2010-2011

investigations into form





A MANIFESTO

FOR
THE RECONCILIATION
OF ART, TECHNOLOGY
& COMMERCE

WITH
FAIRNESS & SUSTAINABILITY

IN
THE
21ST
CENTURY

Apple iTied





GREED



a thesis manifesto

We are artists of all stripes, living in the internet age.
We are the image makers, performers, producers, writers,
and authors of original works. Our labor of love can be seen
and heard on Flickr, YouTube, DeviantArt, iTunes, Facebook,
MySpace, Google search, and countless others.

We reject the dominant forms and practices
of commodification in the arts, which give false privilege
to the patent holders and moguls of industry who seek to
dominate, manipulate, and profit off the labor of others
through means of technological control.

We recognize the need for artists to make a living from their
investment in knowledge, craft and skill. We believe the
current climate in the United States and other capitalistic
societies is in need of a drastic and continual shake-up in
order to make the arts a viable means of survival.

We reject any emergent trend which seeks to reverse the
open and democratic nature of the internet by means of
proprietary and closed technologies.

We reject unilaterally all devices, systems, and technologies,
used to serve the interests of corporations at the expense of
the rights of consumers and individuals.

We demand the immediate rescindment of the Digital
Millenium Copyright Act, which limits Fair Use and increases
the scope of Copyright.

We hold it as self-evident that brokers, dealers, businessmen,
music industry pimps, the CEOs of computer companies
and web services, and all other mediators and lubricators
of a post-industrial capitalistic society are a necessary evil,
although when it comes down to it, we live in an age when
the power of individuals to communicate directly with their
audiences unencumbered by these keepers of the gate is
stronger then ever.

We want a viable alternative to being pimped by the man.

// A MANIFESTO FOR THE RECONCILIATION OF ART, TECHNOLOGY, AND COMMERCE...

We want to live in a world where the development of art and original ideas are cherished more than the bottom line. We feel that a vibrant creative culture in the 21st century no longer need operate on the same basis as the days of the past, when the means of production and distribution were a scarce resource.

Let yesterday's models lie in their graves.



Vinyl Record Album, 1992
✓ Still Works

UP
WITH
ART,

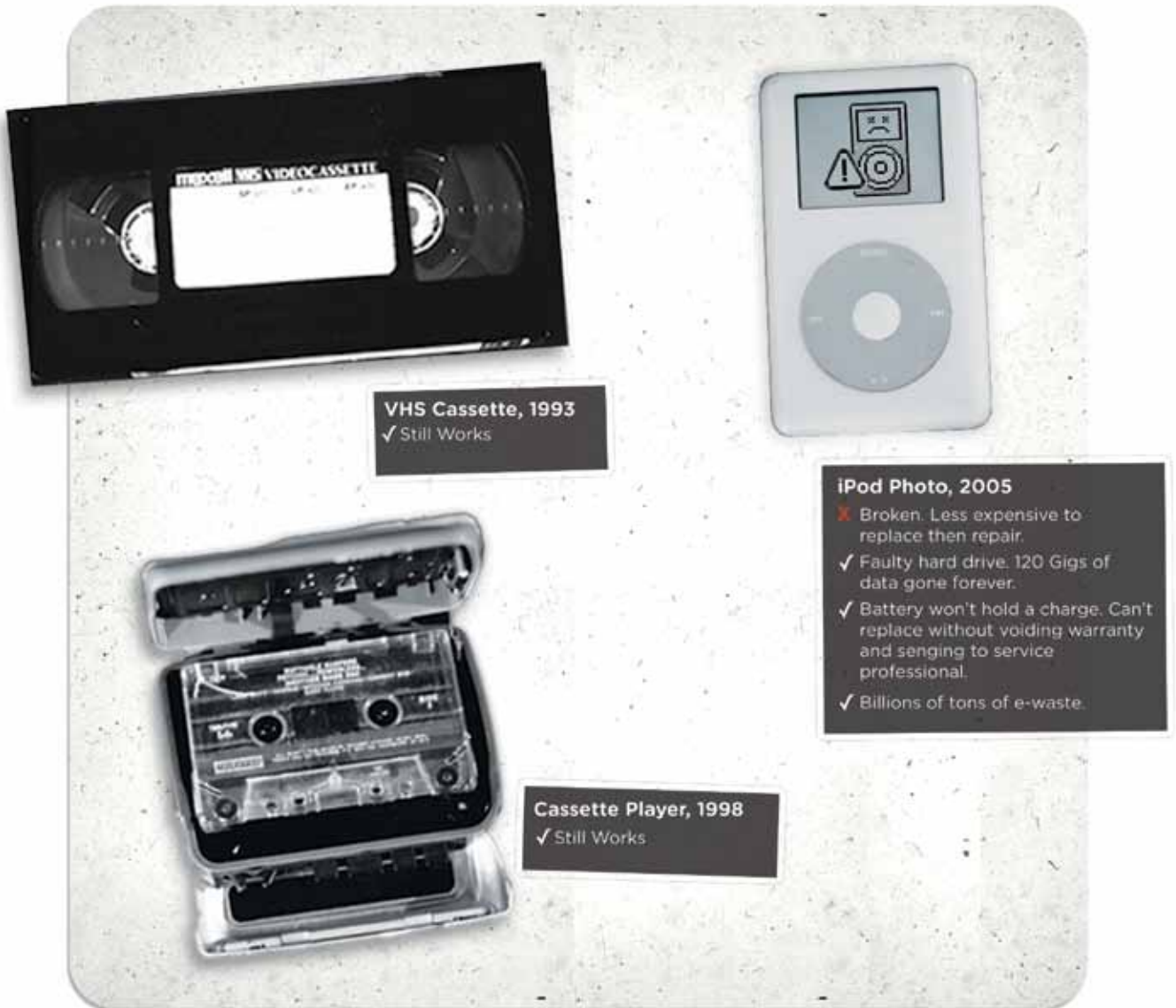
DOWN WITH
COMMERCE.

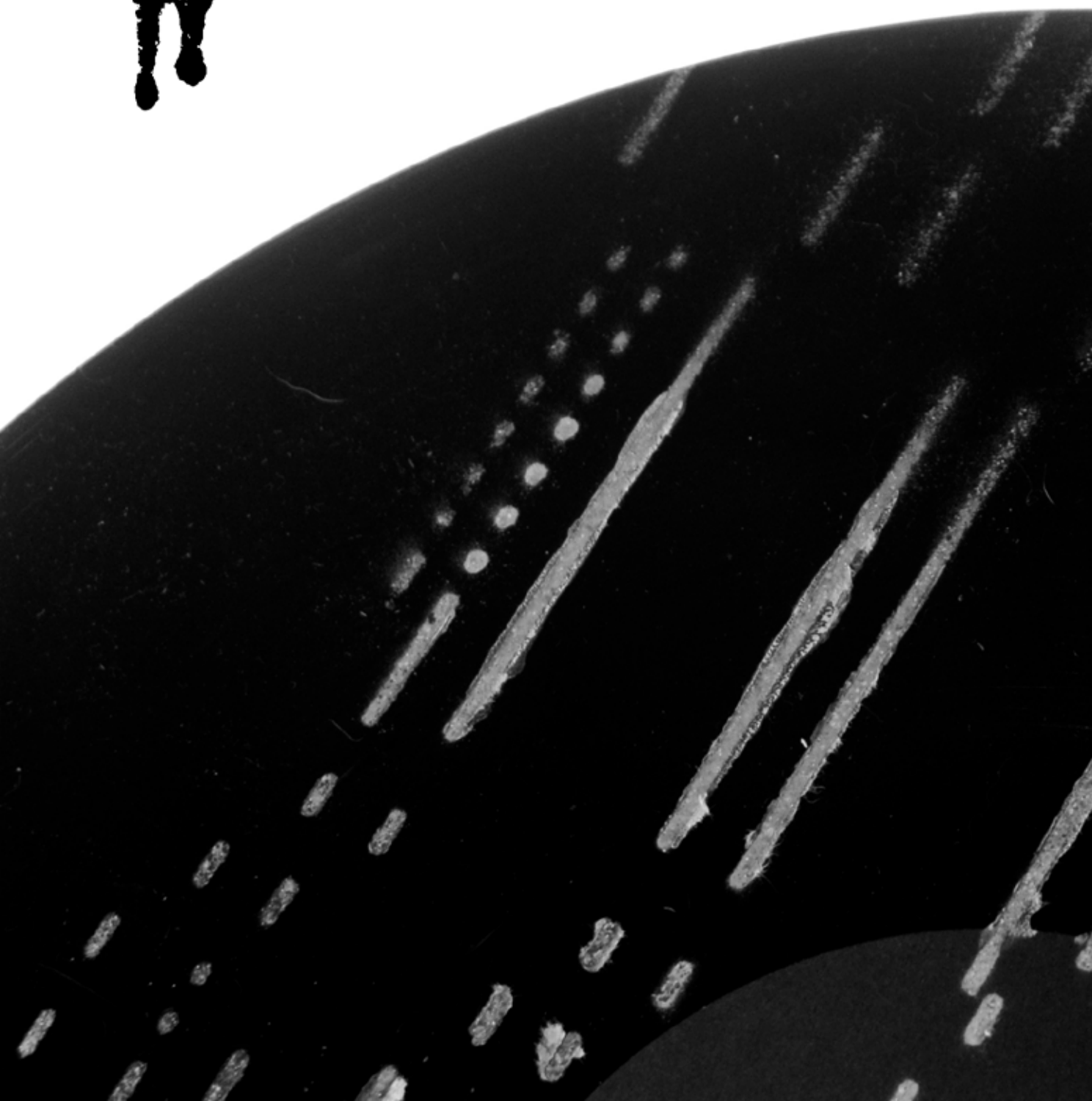
a thesis manifesto

The fight against online piracy is a losing battle that will continue to be fought in all the wrong ways by all the wrong people, with technology as the weapon. We therefore turn that same technology back towards our oppressor. We honor and advocate the continued use of copyright infringing technology until fairness and honor prevail.

Until this day, we embrace the continued proliferation of 'dated' technologies which are free of digital rights management schemes, designed to restrict access and limit freedom.

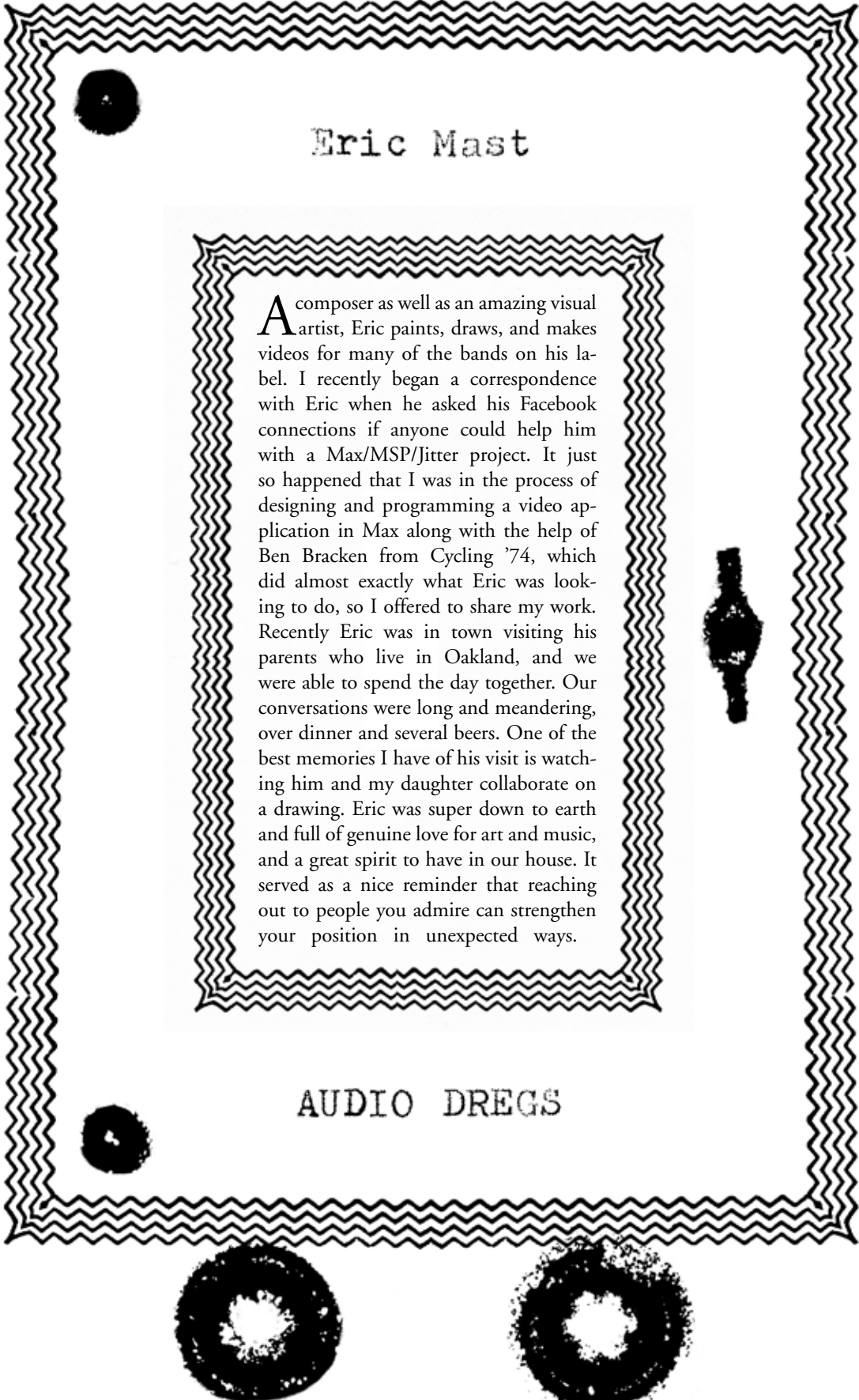
Long live the turntable, vinyl record, and cassette tape. Long live freedom from tyranny.





in ter view
02





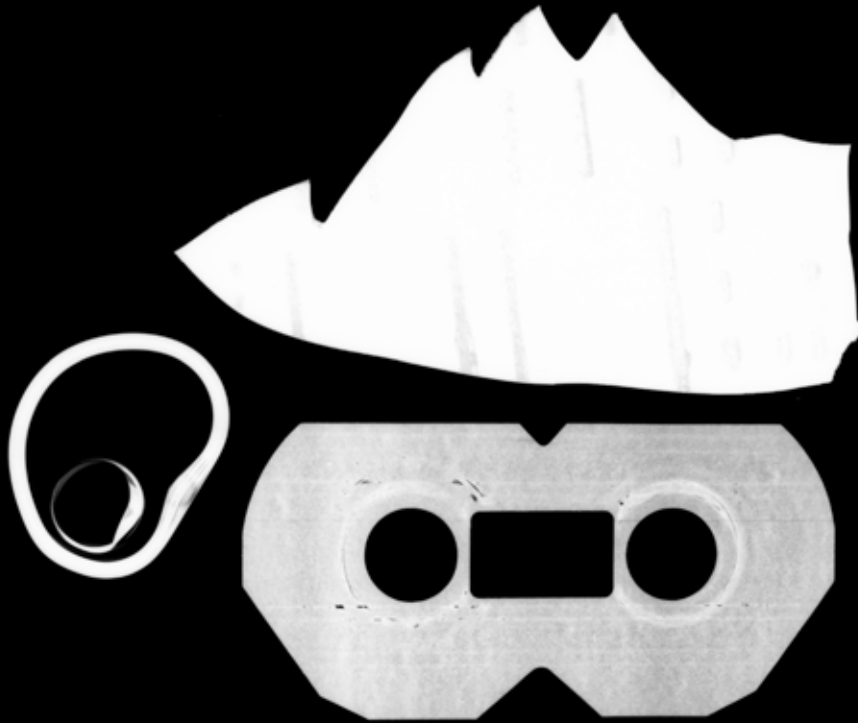
Eric Mast

A composer as well as an amazing visual artist, Eric paints, draws, and makes videos for many of the bands on his label. I recently began a correspondence with Eric when he asked his Facebook connections if anyone could help him with a Max/MSP/Jitter project. It just so happened that I was in the process of designing and programming a video application in Max along with the help of Ben Bracken from Cycling '74, which did almost exactly what Eric was looking to do, so I offered to share my work. Recently Eric was in town visiting his parents who live in Oakland, and we were able to spend the day together. Our conversations were long and meandering, over dinner and several beers. One of the best memories I have of his visit is watching him and my daughter collaborate on a drawing. Eric was super down to earth and full of genuine love for art and music, and a great spirit to have in our house. It served as a nice reminder that reaching out to people you admire can strengthen your position in unexpected ways.

AUDIO DREGS

"there's bands I loved
but I didn't buy the record be-
cause I didn't like the cover,
I just always had a cassette
copy because it didn't matter...

to me I've always wanted



those things to be linked
intrinsically somehow, I want those

things to match up so I've been always
trying to get good at both of them so
I could make them merge somehow"



So you are Eric Mast and you are a visual artist, record producer/musician, if you were to give yourself an über title for the work that you do, what would it be?

I guess musician is all encompassing. I don't know, even though I never really wanted to call myself a musician, calling yourself an artist or musician just seems kind of presumptuous or something, but it's good to have some sort of label to help other people.

One of the things that I've noticed is that there really isn't a label for someone who does both visual art and music and does them both as not necessarily separate things but as a full-on sensorial kind of experience. I guess multimedia artist would be something that I've heard... what do you think about that.

It's definitely a lot easier nowadays for the lines to be blurred more and more which is good I think. It used to be very sort of segregated, even like 10 years ago if someone was just a good musician people automatically wouldn't take their art seriously because they didn't really believe people could do both.

Right. They're primarily one or the other. Or like, Marilyn Manson all of the sudden getting into doing water colors... it's perceived as kind of silly or self indulgent.

Yeah, people want to know what to focus on first.

My first experience with you was when I took my son to a Ratatat show, I'm forgetting the venue, but it might have been 2 or 3 years ago and you opened for them, here in SF. I didn't

know who you were and I had no prior exposure to you. You came out wearing some kind of mask, the audience couldn't see your face, and what you did was not something I had ever really experienced before, in quite that way. I wouldn't exactly categorize it as music, per se. It was definitely more performance art, and I remember my son and I just being shocked and looking at each other a couple times, and we were really super amazed and into it, but I just remember just being kind of like, what? What the hell is going on here? What's this guy doing? How is he making this happen? Because there wasn't any kind of preamble; now I know what you're doing, but at the time it was kind of like wizardry. It was something else besides seeing a band or seeing a laptop musician, it was equally an art experience.

Yeah, it's interesting to hear that. I don't necessarily know what people were getting from my performance at that point. It was a really cool opportunity to do something where I was playing smaller shows. It's reaching a different audience. People in Portland know what I'm doing, I was pretty involved in the noise scene for a long time, and also the electronic scene in Portland, so it was cool to be performing for a more normal audience in a way.

That's another thing I noticed about that show because I'd seen them play a couple years prior to that before anyone knew who they were. I think it was Bottom of the Hill but it wasn't, it was kind of in the same area, south of Market, but I remember that the audience there was really normal, like all the sudden there were frat kids, kind of just super white, normal people.

The more people are into your music, the more the audiences get more homogenous in a way because if you're a super weird band or whatever and you get 2,000 people to show up for your show, that just doesn't really happen that much because the people

who are super into underground music are a small percentage of the population. So once you break that boundary you have a broader range of people at shows so it's kind of interesting, which of course I've never done with my own music. It's not something I've ever experienced on my own, but opening up for my brother's band I get to experience that. It's rad to play a show in your home town for like 50 people who know who you are, and understand it.

I think the fact that people didn't know who you were made it much more powerful and I felt like the feeling of the audience was like, what you were doing was very effective, you definitely had people's attention.

It went off very well in SF and NY for sure.

Well a lot of times opening bands, especially a for a band like that where people are very rabid about Ratatat and people are there for that very explicit experience, I think an opening band is going to be kind of dismissed. That was one of the things I really appreciated about what you were doing; not only was it so different, it wasn't like, categorically something that was, necessarily like a good... or I don't know if it was a bad pairing, but it wasn't necessarily like 'here's a band that's like Ratatat'. Because what you do is very distinct and different.

Though we're also coming from really similar places in a way. We have a lot of collective influences.

Yes, I definitely get that. But I think the performance that you did was just totally original and I think it did compliment it.

Who else was playing? It wasn't American music hall was it? It was kind of like a long dark venue with like a little balcony in the back.



If I bothered to look it up online I'd remember... it wasn't Café Du Nord, I think the other band that played might have been one of the bands on your label.

Panther?

Yeah, it was them. So one of the things I did today is I looked up an interview you did with XLR8R magazine where you were kind of actually talking about that video piece you were using in that show, and so one of the things I was interested in is, I just was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what it is that you're trying to achieve, like if you're thinking about the person who's viewing that in terms of their experience, you talked a bit in that video about how you become desensitized to how crazy and kind of overstimulating it is, and so you're able

to keep adding and adding and adding because you become immune to it, but for a person who actually hasn't encountered it, to a new person, it's quite a lot to take in and I'm wondering if that's something that you have thought about after the fact, or if it's something you were kind of interested in exploring, if that happened in a more organic way or it was something you stumbled upon, and what your intent is in terms of how your audience is responding.

I was definitely interested in psychedelia and video and also pushing the limits of how much information you can take in, and that was also a time too when I was getting more involved with artists like Paper Rad and Nate Boyce and I made a lot of friends who had these similar interests in video, and I was trying to do that. There's

a point where you get sensitized to it but I was just making something, I was just trying to push my own limits first, and then you play it for someone else and it's a different thing for their first time, you know. You know there's no chance that anyone's gonna watch that as many times as I've watched it, because that's just the nature of the beast. I've been thinking about making narrative video, you know like, that Seinfeld video or something, when you watch something a lot you kind of get a totally different perspective; that video is slowing things down and that changes your perception too, you pick up all these nuances, like the jokes, and the awkwardness of the jokes, in a totally different way that's exaggerated that I didn't pick up watching it normally.

One of the things I've noticed is that you're looking at things that are more inconsequential when you watch it at normal speed.



Yeah, to me that stuff I'm drawn to cause you're taking in these micro moments that your brain would take in but by repeating them and slowing them down you're just oversaturated, you just pick up so much more about Jerry Seinfeld's facial expressions then you would on a conscious level, that you might not have picked up on an unconscious level. You probably are picking up all of that, which is what makes Jerry funny to different people. That came out of

recently downloading a torrent of the entire season of Seinfeld.

Wow how many gigs was that? 11 years?

It's like 20 seasons.

That's a lot of television. It's like the longest running show ever, right?

No, Simpsons has them beat. I downloaded that one too so that's how I know

<laughter>

I was getting caught up in that, because I only watched the first season when it came out on TV and then I didn't have a TV for 10 years or something, so I was getting kind of caught up on that, and because I was connected to that. And also with the project called Dreem Street that I was doing with my friend Matt who's the painter, we're doing a limited edition t-shirt screen print run. One of the primary goals of this project is about studying humor, and what makes things funny; why do people respond, and what is the purpose of humor? I feel like we talk about art and stand up comedy and philosophy on all the exact same terms, and so I've come to the conclusion that they all serve the same purpose in life. Stand up comedy in it's purest best form is like philosophy and it's about observing what's around you and pointing things out. I guess philosophy is about drawing conclusions, where it's putting forth conclusions a little more then standup comedy.

Or making a theory instead of just creating a cathartic emotional response to something that is a universal frustration or pain point about life.

But you know art is supposedly for us, it should be doing the same things.

Or sages.



Yeah... so you kind of feel like you should be one part comedian and one part philosopher when you're making art, so that's kind of how we approach that.

To that point I think that the visualization of all of that and the oversaturation of information and that intense experience of your live show, it's like I remember the emotion that I felt was, I was laughing at the insaneness. I mean, it was really really funny, but then it does have a kind of a socio-political angle to it as well because it's really expressing who we are as a society, that we're this video game kind of virtual reality and explosions, it's pure bombardment of sensation with absolutely no content or context.

Sensation is important too. We live in an over-sensational society, but a purely sensational thing is also like being a kid; it's putting you out of your societal barriers a little bit and just making you experience something in the moment, in the now. Even though it took hours and hours of me being OCD to create this thing which is like, you realizing you need to have a few beers once in awhile, that's kind of my same thing. I'm killing myself for three days by staying up all night to produce this video that just makes you like, live in the moment for a second. Maybe in the end that's how I got there, I realized I wanted to get there... to me that's like what psychedelia is about. It just so happens that I don't have an interest in psychoactive drugs, so I am finding other ways

of reaching similar mindstates. That sounds hoaky but I'm just trying to strike a chord.

So this being in the now, is that like your're kind of putting almost a wrench in the machinery? Are you trying to create something that forces people to get out of their patterned modes of thinking?

Yeah, that's what we all want in a way when we go to a show, we want the person, musicians and craftsmanship to be effective enough that we feel that emotion, and that we're having an experience where we're not just part of ourselves, we're part of the entire audience. We're like a collective and we're part of the band. I feel Ratatat is a perfect example of that because their music draws upon that. That's what rave culture was about-taking the rock star off the stage for a moment. The rock star was there to help bring you into that moment of one with the music and one with the band, just having that moment. But there's so many other layers you can bring into your art, and so many social political ideas you can bring in to your music. But their music is creating that moment where it's emotion, and it's more than emotion. There's so much behind it that you can get into, but it's also just about getting out of yourself and your're part of this community and you're part of the band. That's part of what's great about them, it's become almost anonymous now with all their video and their light show and it's almost like watching Daft Punk, where there's these puppet masters up there helping you get to this fantasy zone for a minute. I'll find myself in the audience with some jock guy who, you know, we'd never get along in any other situation, but we're both pumping fists together and he's giving me high fives. I don't know this guy, it's just some guy in L.A. but he's giving me high fives and he's just like YEAAAHHHHHHHHHHH, and you know I'm glad he's excited, too.

<laughs>

It's the power of the riff, you know, that brings us all together.

And you can go back and analyze that as much as you want because we've been doing that stuff since the beginning of time when we were dancing around the fire and beating on a drum; we have to always up the ante nowadays. It's harder for us to hear someone just play Kumbaya and shed a tear; now we want the fireworks and lasers and the three guitar leads, and then maybe we'll shed a tear.

<tons of laughing>

But it's all part of that social evolution, you can't sleep on it, it's commercialism too.

I don't know, I feel like Ratatat is kind of the opposite of evolution in a way, it's like a little bit of de-evolution, a kind of taking the best aspects of nostalgia and what really is great about rock music and simple riff driven beat driven, primal, you know, energetic, but also a little bit of melancholy just to round it out, that it feels also real and not just contrived to create a happy emotion.

Well they're not thinking about that stuff, they just hang out and play music, and then they just try to make it as good as they can. They talk about technology and that stuff too. The reason why they're making beats like that is because that's how Evan made beats when we both got into electronic production together. I was using a four track and then I bought an Akai S-20 sampler, which just had a key of banks and you could-

Like an MPC type of thing

Yeah like a primitive MPC type of thing, so I got that and then he bought the same sampler, like a year later. And within 2 months he was teaching me new tricks on it. Then I

had bought a PC and then he came to visit me the first time in Portland, to master the first 7 inch. He had started making music on the Akai, and I was like, 'oh this stuff's great, I'm going to do a 7 inch, because my car broke down', so I was like, 'now I have 400 dollars a month that I didn't have before because I'm not driving anymore', so I'm going to put out a 7 inch of my brother's music. He was surprised that I wanted to do that. He came up to visit me and we were hanging out and I had mastered it on my computer, and we added some sound effects in the middle of the song. The song was called 'Playing the Rackets', so we added some shoe squeaks of people playing tennis in the middle of the song, just for a minute, and he was like, "woah, you can do so much with this," and so then he went and got a Mac as soon as he left. Then we started producing music on the computers. He had his own approach to making beats, inspired by hip-hop and Jay Z's producers.

You just use the technology that you have around you, and you're just like "woah this thing is cool and I'm excited about using this," and it's fun so you push the limits on what the tools can do. I had the sampler and I was like, "I have these sounds and I can sample beats and I can sample sounds and I can sample tones," so I was playing different melodies maybe and playing different stuff, but then my brother is like, "I'm going to sample all these sounds around me," and he was just playing his own beats, onto the 4 track and then he was sampling his freestyles and making the beats after that. Now he's got a break, and I was just like, "why didn't I think of that?", I been using this for a year and he's had it for 2 months and now he's making his own breaks and sampling one bar of what I'm playing; now I have a break but it's my own beat.

That's kind of how drum and bass is made, these little fragments, rudiments.

The basics with drum and bass was, you took a break of prerecorded music, and then you doubled it so you took the hip-hop beat and you double timed it on top of itself then you set all new start points for the breaks so you could cut up the beat.

This to me was cool because he was taking every day sounds around his room, hitting bottles and stuff, and he was building a break from scratch out of what he was playing with his fingers and then sampling that. I was just excited because he was making a break himself, not sampling someone else's break, and he figured out how to make a mechanical repetition of this thing where it's just such a simple next step; plus one of his friends had a Korg S-20 or something, and so he found out you could run the signal back through this synthesizer and filter the beats, so that was also so revolutionary to us. He was making a beat, and then he could effect it after it was leaving the sampler and then add accents to it so it wasn't the same break the entire time, and then go back on the 4 track. He still could add a bass line and melody and whatever, so that was basically how we got into making electronic music. Before that we were playing in punk bands.

So I guess I just wondered if you thought about it from a more theoretical standpoint, of you know, this idea of overexposure, oversaturation, everything at once...

Yeah, definitely.

And I mean, it's very effective obviously because it's almost like an anti-aesthetic in terms of what we're conditioned to understand.

Well I definitely thought about it too, where there's this whole thing when you've got A.D.D they give you

speed so that you get to that point where you're over-stimulated to the point where you just kind of go into catharsis or whatever, you mellow out because there's too much for you to take in, so you kind of shut down. I think I've felt that as a kid when I was put in social situations where there's too much going on.

Do you have ADD?

I don't think officially, I never had ADD. I mean, you know there's definitely like a range.

There's a continuum of it and there's also different types. I was labeled with that, so I was extremely hyper active and used to do like this kind of, fidgeting; I couldn't really deal with school, I was kicked out of schools and stuff.

See, I was super mellow, I mean I

wasn't very ADD but I definitely felt like when I was really young, if I was put in a social situation where there's a lot going on, I couldn't really handle it, it was too much stimulus, too much going on, especially when I was really young, I don't even know how old. When I was around three years old my mom would take me to the YMCA and I was supposed to play. There were kids running around having fun and I would just go sit in the corner by myself because I just couldn't deal. It was too much.

Did you overcome that?

Yeah.

Are you OK with that now? You're obviously a performer and you can get up in front of hundreds of people and do that.



Eric's music video for "I Love Your Music" by Tobiah, 2004

I mean that's almost easier to me then, because you don't see the details and that's part of the explosions. I spend so much time on them and there's so much detail, and I layer it with so much other stuff and it becomes almost like a pattern unto itself. It's easier for me to understand the big picture then to pay attention to each individual person, so it becomes like part of the patch work, a part of the whole.

I was actually thinking about this today when I was at the MOMA because there was a video presentation that had like six chapters and they're all on a different TV. They would just show blank color for awhile, but it was still a kind of narrative thing. It almost drove me crazy at first because I couldn't just watch. I could watch one and pick up on it, but it made it so much harder to figure out the entire thing. When I do a video installation, I'll just put as much information as possible going on all 5 televisions and they never match up; that way you don't have to know the whole picture, you can walk in at any point and it's gonna be the same thing, because it's part of the din and the noise. I kind of like that, when it's too much to take in, so you give up. You don't have to understand it all, you can just watch details or you can just enjoy it as a cacophony. To me that's kind of what noise is about. It's just sort of getting in and enjoying the patchwork of the whole, and not trying to understand all of the details.

I wonder if that's why they say white noise is soothing for babies.

I think that's different because there's no social ramification to white noise. You don't have to understand the details. There's no pieces of narrative, where it's like our culture with the television and everything around us, there's so many pieces of narrative and you can get in to any direction at any time. Any song that comes on the radio, you can

look them up and know their whole life style and life story and go all the way. You can tweak out on anything in any direction. You have to put up such huge filters; we can't know everything but it's something like white noise. It's nice in it's abstraction, because you don't have to know anything. <laughs>

It's super generic it's almost like a really basic algorithm for what nothingness, if it had a form, would be, but there's no fragments of other pieces of something-ness inside of it. It's all evenly spaced and perfect kind of.

I think there's probably like a physical hard wired reason why kids get into it too that has to do with how their brain is made up, the hardware inside of them.

I think that creative people who work for a long enough time tend to develop certain proclivities and certain things that they just naturally end up doing. How would you describe your aesthetic?



That's a hard one. I studied visual art in school, but almost everything I've done has been very music driven. Even when I'm painting I can't really paint without music playing, that's just part of what drives me, so a lot of the vocabulary I use is very informed by the music. I feel like my vocabulary is more music world than art world these days, but I feel like the music was always more of a challenge to me than art. Art always came easier than music. It's always balancing back and forth, and I've never been very good at deciding exactly what I'm going to be doing at any given moment. Even at this stage in my life, this year I was like, ok I'm going to go to L.A. and focus on painting and artwork for awhile, but in doing that it kind of forced me to finish this album I've been working on forever... so I finally got an album done for the first time since 2002 that I'll be putting out this spring.

It's kind of funny because I went to grad school in design and I ended up doing music in design school; it's kind of the same thing, I could never focus on one thing, it would drive me nuts, it's almost like I need to defocus on that one thing.

But also too, the design was always so important to me, with the music. There's bands I loved but I didn't buy the record because I didn't like the cover; I just always had a cassette copy because it didn't matter. I've kind of always wanted those things to be linked intrinsically somehow, I want those things to match up, so I've been always trying to get good at both of them so I could make them merge somehow.

For me personally, that's made my artistic progress go much slower because I kind of vacillate between working in the visual and the musical realms, but in another way it often kind of helps me; I mean, composition



is composition, it still somehow feels like you know you're designing a sensorial experience.

Yeah.

And you're sort of in charge of manipulating someone's emotions and thoughts.

Yeah. And it's made me also ask what's important about those things, especially later in my life. At this point I'm in my late 30's now, all of the sudden, and I asked, why did I like music and why did I like art? When you're younger, there's certain things you align yourself with. That's part of the reason you're interested in music because of the social implications, and then you get into the craft of it, but at the end it doesn't matter what the medium is so much, you're interested in ideas.

You're interested in the shapes and sounds and forms but it's because there's so much else that comes with it socially as humans, and connecting with people.

It's a form of alchemy, at least for me, being a self-taught person and somebody that's had a somewhat difficult time learning in a formal way about these things that I love to do, and discovering... it's like you have a lab of materials, and it's like discovering how these materials react to one another and the sensations that they produce, is just really interesting to figure it out and to play with it, the ability to make someone, to elevate someone's thoughts or feelings and get them out of their doldrums.

Yeah, and there's so many different approaches. I remember when I first got into music, like being in high school I was listening to the college radio station, and finally about these bands, to me it was interesting because so many of these bands existed in a world that was so different then my world. It was sort of like beyond the suburban living in the middle of nowhere in Ohio, just listening to a band like Chrome, didn't even sound like they were even from the same planet.

They weren't.

<laughs> But you're like, "woah, these are adults living their lives, producing this thing," and when you look at the record cover, they weren't part of my world at all. I remember when I first went to college, this Chinny Chin Chin compilation. Four New York Bands like on C.I. which turns out

was this guy Mike McGonigal who does Yeti Magazine, who is a friend of mine, who I met years later. I remember seeing the photo on the back cover, it had someone's house, there were drawings on the refrigerator and all this stuff going on, and I didn't know if all these four bands lived in the same house together, but here was this sort of interesting beat up house where young adults lived a creative lifestyle, and they were making this music that was totally weird and awesome. These bands were like Kicking Giant who were from NY and later Olympia, kind of K records scene.

Sleepyhead were NY sort of. They ended up getting more poppy but then there's also this band Wal-Drug who is Mark Ibold who went on to be in Pavement, and there's a track with Liz Phair singing on it. But it was all these weirdos, and then the last band, my favorite band was Fantastic Palace which it turns out was just this one guy and a 4 track, weird loopy stuff. At the same time I got into early electronic music and the Boredoms, and his stuff fit in perfectly, it was really

melodic but really out there, some vocals, but most of it was just instrumental. It kind of sounded like it was looping, but it would just be him playing the same riff, like weird time signatures and stuff; really experimental but melodic, which is a big part of what Audio Dregs was about in the beginning; experiments in melody, not just noise. To me it all showed how you can create your own world and live in your own world, that was kind of like what this music was about for me. A big part of what my experience in Portland was like,



in running a label, it was supporting people to try and create their own worlds and push the limits and get their music out there and make these worlds a reality, this creative lifestyle a reality. Whatever you wanted to do.

After my record, the next record I think I want to do is a Fantastic Palace reissue. I wanted to see if he had any tapes that he hadn't released, and turns out he had three other tapes, which are all awesome. They're all like 20 minutes long, so we're gonna do the first two tapes on 1 LP, and then maybe if we can sell enough, do another LP with the other 2 tapes. One of my weird treasure chest bands that I happened to discover. No-one else is gonna reissue them because there was only like a handful of fans, but to me, that was one of my favorite bands to this day. So I was pretty stoked to get in touch with that guy. He's become a successful artist in upstate New York, and still doing art, but he was doing music at that particular time in his life. The drawings on the refrigerator that I saw on the back of that record I think were his drawings, so it all ties together.

Do you feel like you've been able to do that for artists? Have you actually been able to create the ability for artists to do their art and sustain their art? Can you talk about that? That's a great brief for a record label.

I haven't been able to make enough money selling any particular artist

on my labels to pay their rent or anything, but when I moved to Portland there wasn't an electronic music scene; part of the reason I moved there was because it was a frontier, you could do whatever you wanted, there was no established scene per se except for a tiny bit of a grunge scene that quickly faded. So I feel like there was a lot of people I connected with in Portland and we kind of built something out of nothing, so I feel good about that. At this point I don't know if I need to be there anymore because there's enough going on now, I can leave town and it doesn't

matter if I disappear at this point and time. There's still stuff that I can do that people will appreciate, but the role of the label isn't as important now. I started off just dubbing tapes of my friends' music so that 40 of my other friends could have copies of it. I wasn't doing it because I wanted to be a record label. I didn't really want to be a label guy, I just wanted to make music and share it with other people. So I was like, if I can make copies of my own, I can convince my other friend who

is recording all this great music that I could make copies for him too, so I'm forcing him to put a collection of 20 songs together and then I'm duping them on to a tape and then making a cover for it... that's kind of all it was.

Did you start out with cassette as a format?

Yeah. Which, I mean, cassette is great because you can make as many as you need. And we thought we had an





unlimited supply. It's an unlimited edition for us, even though we were only making like 40 or whatever, it was kind of like, that's all we need so we'll just make that. It's interesting now how kids are making cassettes and it's coming back into fashion. I've got friends who are 22 who are doing cassette labels, just the exact same way I started but their whole thing ... it's different for them because they're making something that is only 50 copies because it's only 50 copies, and if you get it you get it, and if you don't you don't.

So it's treating it as limited edition.

Yeah, it's a reaction against the MP3 almost in a way.

Right.

But it also helps them to produce a solid body of work, not just post a

track they made in their basement today. It's like, "oh I have to put together a whole tape."

There's a cut off point, I'm going to canonize this body of work.

I want people to hear this collection and this represents me. So it still works, functionally, on the same level.

How much of your business as Audio Dregs is driven by digital downloads vs. hard copy of anything?

I don't know. I guess next time I get my statement from my distributor I'll know. It's different now then it was a year ago.

So it's fluxuating over time.

Yeah. And it's, yeah. I mean, hard copy is-

Is hard copy trending down?

Yeah, it's breaking even, maybe. I feel like I've gone back 10 years. I started off breaking even so I could put out another one. And then for awhile I actually got to pay the artists a little bit of money and put it in to the next project. And now it's like a hobby label almost, practically... with some licensing here and there.

I'm assuming that's affecting your decisions in terms of what you can do.

I'm putting out less stuff.

And so you have to be more selective about what you put out... are you thinking in terms of what's going to do well, vs. what you really believe in? Are you having to make those kind of calls?

Well, for me it's a matter of time. I don't have the time to put out as much stuff, so a lot of it's about budgeting time. That's part of the



reason why I needed to work on my music, I needed to stop putting out other people's music.

Worrying about everyone else and just worry about you.

I don't need that much money to get by because I live in Portland, so I should just like, spend 6 months working on my art and my music and put the label aside for awhile. Once things became more commercial I became less interested. I mean, it was nice when things sold, because then I could put out things that I didn't think were going to sell at all too. But at this point I don't think anyone's going to buy a Fantastic Palace LP, but that's the next thing I want to do. Because as long as I can scrape enough money together...

That's where your heart is at! That's what you want to give birth to!

Yeah! That's what I want a copy of! And this way I'll have doubles... I'll have 500 copies sitting in my house! Hopefully someone else will want it.

Well that's the problem between doing something for yourself and doing something that is aligned to the market.

Yeah but you don't know what people are going to want either. There's some things that are obvious...

But when you're running a label, I'm assuming that you're in the business of selling product, so in order to stay afloat, you have to.

I've been pretty good about only putting out stuff I'd want to listen to myself. I've never had to rely on the label to pay my rent, so I've never had to panic.

Do you have a day job?

Right now, no. I worked at a record store for 10 years when I first moved to Portland as a buyer, and then I slowly scaled back and was doing more

freelance work.

Is your design work your bread and butter?

In 2010 I made like no money, so I don't even know. When I get home this weekend I'll do my taxes and find out where I actually made money. For awhile I was doing Flash animation, one year Flash was probably paying my bills, other times print design was, other times I was designing websites, and another time I was doing audio design, so I got more and more jobs as I worked less hours at the record store and it just worked out really organically and I never had to really apply for jobs. I just kind of got lucky. I put in one résumé after I got this job at the record store. The only portfolio I ever put together was for this independent design firm called Plasm, just because my old housemate used to work for them and they used to do a magazine that I actually used to buy when I was in college, that was around the time of Émigré and Raygun. They were doing an independent 'zine that was getting distribution at Borders and I discovered it, and they were publishing fonts, and I was doing a 'zine, and I was at that point where I was going to design my own font, and put out an issue of my 'zine using my own font. Well, it wasn't any good but it was a learning experience.

Did you design a typeface?

Yeah, I did. I did this stuff in college, they came out with this program called Fontographer, which is now the industry standard. At the time I was like, "wow this is how you can create your own font." So I figured out how to do it.

I haven't done that yet. That's something I'd like to learn how to do.

I haven't done it in like 12-15 years



<laughs> but I was into it for a period.

Well the business of running a label, I mean it almost sounds like you're gonna scale it back and maybe even shut it down, that it's not worth the time.

I'll still do stuff, but I mean, I might be just putting more effort into releasing my own material.

Yeah.

Or, I don't know, I would release stuff on another label, if there was that opportunity to. I know I'll still keep it going for sure, but it just might be me putting out two things a year instead of five.

One of the things that I'm interested in and investigating in my thesis is this idea of the physical artifact of the recorded object, and kind of...

Well, that's why I'll always keep doing the record label, is because I

still have an appreciation for the physical artifact.

Do you think that there will be a renaissance of the physical artifact at some point, that people will realize that it's important again? It seems like now it's as good as dead.

Well there's definitely people that do it. But you have access to so much stuff. Personally what I think is the next step, which I guess they're already doing in Europe, which is like a giant database, with all the music on it, we don't need to buy MP3s, we can just stream everything we want, any time we want, just like a radio station where you pick your songs, and then your all time favorites, you buy the vinyl or you buy your artifact and you get to have it and you get to own it and play it.

But isn't there an aspect to what you do which is like... there's a rarification of it? I mean, I think growing up loving independent and underground music, there's an appreciation and reverence for a found piece of work, like your guy you were talking about before, it's something you've probably turned all of your friends on to, and no-one else really knows about but you discovered this person. It isn't part of the mainstream and it's not plugged into the cloud. I think we want that, as people who appreciate music, we want to discover those things and have them be ours; I think there's an element of exclusivity to liking underground music.

People like to discover stuff though someone else.

It's like, people who are into wine, people who are into whatever, 'zine





culture is kind of the same way.

The idea of an artifact that is a limited edition artifact, where there's only 40 of these things of them in the world

But if those 40 things are crap then you don't care about them either.

But if they're brilliant then they go for 200 dollars on eBay, like Guitar Wolf lathe cuts. Whatever.

I was super into Guitar Wolf. For sure.

So I understand, there's already products out there like Rhapsody, and Pandora, and all of these things, I don't really use them but...

Yeah 'cause most of them are shit.

Well they have all of the mainstream stuff that you would find at Best Buy, but that's never been the world that I've inhabited, you know?

But you can still find so much weird stuff, it's like even beyond, there's more stuff to filter through, that's the worst part.

There's also something about the relationship of the artist and the record label and the consumer,

too. We live in a time where a guy like you and guy like me, we can make our art, we can put it up on the internet, and you know, I have two tracks that are played on SomaFM, and I have people, you know, I'm not well known, but I still get emails from like, you know, weird places, where they're like "where can I buy your album?" you know, and I'm like, here, you can just have it, you can download it for free... but there's this relationship that happens between the artist and the person who appreciates what the artist does.

And those people might actually want the object, to get the full experience of your thing that you're creating.

Exactly. And I think that there's also a devaluation that occurs when it's in the cloud, there's something about a digital file that it can be perfectly reproduced and copied, and there's nothing to it... that I think that instant access causes us to treat it like it's not important.

When you had to lay down your hard earned money to pick up the record, you made sure you really wanted it before you took it home. And then sometimes you didn't take it home and you're like, I wish I had done that? Why didn't I?

And that's kind of a carry over from when I was a kid, I would get 10 bucks and go to the mall and I could buy one record, one cassette, and I'd have to choose, do I want Ghost in the Machine, or like, Men at Work?

<laughter>

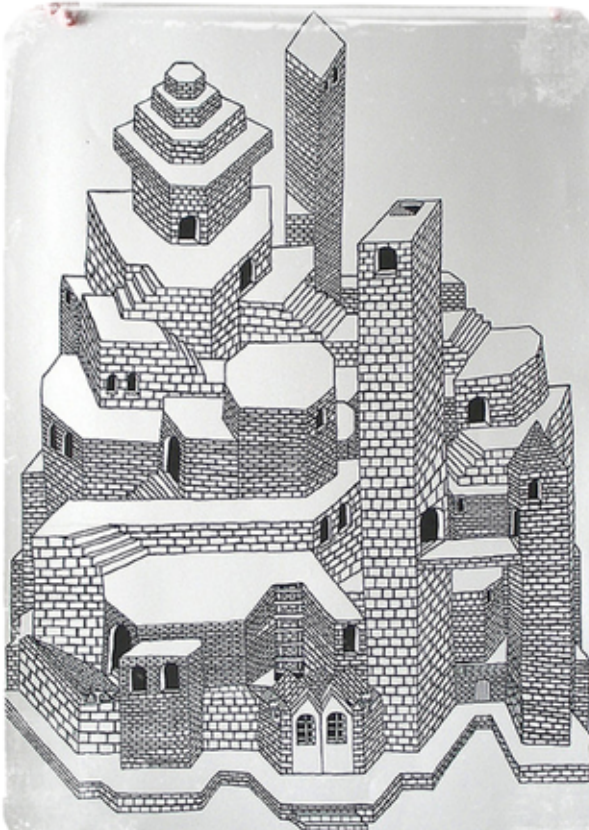
You know, and then you'd take it home, and sometimes you'd be like, fuck, why didn't I choose the other one? This is kind of lame, but it would grow on you, because you only had one, you'd have to make it work.

You'd have to give it a second chance. Yeah, I feel like nowadays you listen

to the first 4 seconds of a song, and you're like, next... next... next... That's kind of the problem with iTunes, it's easier to get lost in the shuffle in a way, because you don't have the record store clerk going like, "I got a promo copy, check it out," and then 3 people being like "What is this?" And then being like, "It's this..." you don't really have that anymore. Those independent record stores were the bread and butter of labels like mine. We didn't have money for advertisements, so...

It's all word of mouth. If you're putting out great product then people will naturally back you. And having other people working in the record store who are just as knowledgeable and into strange things.

Yeah they want to hear the new things, they're the same way. They're addicted to hearing new stuff. They're not happy listening to the same Lynyrd Skynyrd record their whole life.



I think there's almost 2 different kinds of music; there's the music that is Lynyrd Skynyrd, that is the kind of music that you know, it's almost the kind of music that happened in the golden age of recording where it was like, The Hit, that kind of unified everybody in a kind of water cooler kind of way, everybody was listening to Sgt. Peppers at exactly the same time in history; it was like the zeitgeist of the time. And then there's the more kind of segmented underground indie currents of all of these different sort of micro-brews of music that feel very much unique to the individual and it's almost the antithesis of wanting to connect with the global or universal idea of what matters; it's like, this matters to me, and I don't necessarily want you to have it, I don't want you to experience the same thing that I love.

Both things are important I think. The big things are so important too, because there's so many people I connected with over different records that were like our own personal zeitgeists or whatever, "oh wow, you actually know what this is? Great." And then you forge friendships over that.

What was the last popular top 40 thing that mattered to you?

Oh, I still listen to mainstream Hip-Hop all the time. Actually I didn't for years, but then when I was in L.A. I started listening to stuff again. That song Black and Yellow, you know that song? It's brilliant. And then there's the G-Mix which is maybe even better. Watch the video. It's got like, Snoop Dogg doing a verse, T-Pain, Juicy Jay...

They're all like action hero cartoons.

Yeah, exactly. I mean they're great. I definitely have certain friends that listen to Hip-Hop stuff too.

I think I get some of that stuff from like, I'm really into the Booty compilations, which is like my deep



dark secret. I love those things.

What are they?

They're mash-up compilations. And they actually have club parties, too. Every year they release a best of mash-ups compilation, and they're actually really entertaining. I mean, pop and R&B, rap and everything. Mixing Journey with whatever. I find them to be both humorous and also sonically innovative.

Yeah, they can be totally clever and exciting on different levels. Even the mainstream is so fragmented now it's like, especially in the world of Hip-Hop I think it's totally interesting, because if you get into an artist they've all got their own—what do you call it when you have your background players and your front? You've got your main characters in a movie? And you have all your supporting actors. It's like, in Hip-Hop, if you focus on any one through the song, they're always the main, everyone's like a main character. You just have to learn their story. They all have crazy backgrounds and stuff. They're all just like, dudes trying to make something of themselves. So it's like...

Pull themselves up by their bootstraps. It's like a total Republican archetype.

All the best Hip-Hop dudes come from the poorest neighborhoods. They've all got crazy stories.

Well, some of the time it's not really true, right? But they have to spin that for street cred.

Yeah, that's part of the game. That's what's interesting about a lot of those dudes. Wiz Khalifa is interesting because he's from Pittsburgh. There's no rap scene in Pittsburgh! He's got his charm and his thing, and that's kind of funny, they're all individual people that have their own weird world around them, their own

stories, it's just about the ideas again, there's so much detail, it's pretty awesome.

Yeah, that whole genre is all about the personal narrative, it's much less about innovation musically—it doesn't seem—I think the aesthetics moves a lot slower than the storytelling...

Yeah, I think that's true. If you're a Wire magazine subscriber, people have stories too, but there's like... so many of the dudes you're interested in for formal issues... you're like, ah, another white guy with a laptop, whatever... right? I don't expect people to be interested in my story necessarily, that's why I'm showing videos and doing stuff that's like, wearing a mask or whatever, is to make up for my lack.

Yeah, I dig the mask. I wanted to touch on the videos you make for your artists. Do you talk to the artists about the project? Do you get a brief from them? How do you start? I was looking at the latest one you did for Copy...

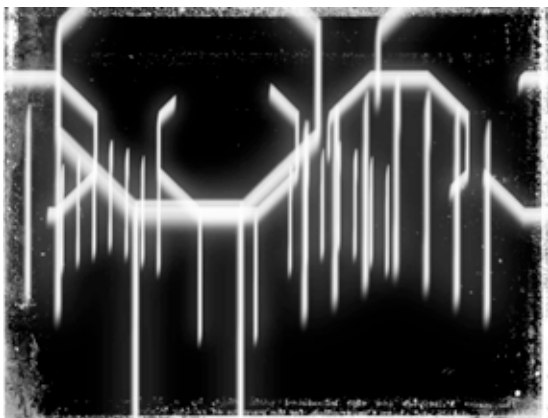
Oh there's two Copy ones, there's one that's more black and white, with the lines...

I've watched that one a bunch of times, I think it's really really good, and I also watched some clips by the artist that you were inspired by. I was wondering what sort of prompted that, how that got started, why you decided to use that as an inspiration. I thought it was really an innovation on what the original artist did, it took it one step further. I was really delighted by talking to you about how you actually filmed that; how it was actually done in Flash and then filmed on a tv.

Well, most of it is normal up to a point, and then the last quarter is filmed on a tv so it kind of mixes it up.

It just goes really well with the song too because the song is a kind of 8 bit thing.

I'm just grabbing different aesthetics that I enjoy. The artist himself, the video artist, I watched an interview with him talk about that, and you know there wasn't really the technology to make actual 3D graphics at that point.



He's the guy that did the Star Wars thing right?

Oh is he?

Yeah I think in the original Star Wars he did all the original computer stuff where they're going into the Death Star.

I know that in one he had made, he made vectors and put a fake 3D thing on it, and I kind of like that aesthetic.

You mean just like a bevel on the shapes?

Yeah. So the way I made that video, I just made a vector that was moving, like an animated simple vector, and I brought it into after effects and put a drop shadow on it, and I put like 7 drop shadows on it

And there's a glow.

I made the shadows white. And I added a blur, and then a glow. So it didn't look like it was made in Flash anymore. That was kind of the idea.

So you're saying the only part that's actually the TV is that transition in the middle?

Yeah, but the cover of the album I designed in illustrator and then brought it into Final Cut and burned a DVD and then took a photo of the television. So I'm playing with the same ideas graphically, as a graphic designer for the album cover, as I am for the video, even though they're completely different. It's the idea of this sort of physicality, it's about outdated technology, and it's also an interest in this sort of blown out aesthetic; and it's also about artificiality, there's just different things there. He still uses the same software to make his music that he's been using for ten years, I think he's still using Fruity Loops. I don't even know because he's a PC guy.

But it's a very bare bones setup.

But he's also a great musician and plays in other bands, playing bass and stuff, and so it's kind of good for him because it limits his palette. He's got his own aesthetic palette that he works within, his own boundaries. I kind of like that about it. It's almost less distracting when you create your own boundaries and



try to work within that. That was part of why it took me so long to make a record, it was like, oh I can do anything. Where it's like, the first record I did, I knew what I wanted it to sound like in my head before I made it. Me and my brother were working with specific ideas, using everyday sounds, making beats out of them, stuff like that. Which nowadays is just old hat, it's just something you do anyway, you always do that. It took some of the focus off and made it more difficult for me to make an album because I didn't have a story in my head of what it was supposed to sound like, so it took me a long time to carve out of stone this idea of what I was making.

Do you consciously limit yourself to a set of ideas? Do you now try to constrain your scope before you will start on a project? Because when you're talking about all of the options, I think that's something I've had a problem with too.

I recorded a second record's worth of material that I'm going to release on cassette actually. Near the end of this record when I couldn't really finish it and I started recording a piece every day on the Juno 60 built off of arpeggios, and so it's just solo Juno 60 recordings. To me it's like John Carpenter outtakes or something; it's kind of mysterious. It's about this sort of arpeggiated synth sound but also about atmosphere. I'm going to put that out probably around the same time as the other record, maybe right after, just as a cassette release. That was way

easier to make, because I've been playing with that for 10 years. One instrument. It's like doing a solo guitar record where you're just doing standards. It's my version of Christmas Standards on acoustic guitar.

That's interesting because that's like the polar opposite of what you're doing with the video, which is like, really over-blown and full-on.

Well if you look at that Copy video too, it's the same thing. It's like white and black.



Just one line.

Limiting yourself. But also when I started that, I had just gotten done with the video that I had spent way too much time on; it took forever. For this band, JonnyX and the Groadies, they're this weird metal band from Portland that I'd been telling I want to do a video of them for years. This old noise

band I was in was playing with them every fourth of July for like six years or something. So I drew so many things by hand for that, and then I just did so many layers and it's just like a full on kind of cartoon piece. And so I was like, I need to do something I can do from start to finish in like, one day. So, that was my whole thing, I'm going to do this whole thing in one sitting. I'm going to sit down for 12 hours and then just be done. Of course it still took me like a week.

But you had the idea of limiting.

Yeah, I was getting back pains from sitting at the computer and drawing all the time.



And I think you also lose perspective with what it is you're trying to do at a certain point.

And the computer loses perspective too. It doesn't want 800 layers of stuff with effects on everything, it's like, if you've only got 2 layers, the computer is much happier, and you get to see it in real time, for the most part.

Were you more satisfied with the simple video then with the thing you did that took a million years and stressed you out?

I don't know. Probably. I mean, they're for different audiences. Different people will like the Copy video. Those people won't necessarily like the JonnyX video and vice-versa.

I think that I sometimes prefer the results of things when I'm not paying attention fully and just kind of screwing around.

You don't have time to get tired of it.

I'm not tryng to say anything or be anything or put any kind of stake in the sand about anything.

You don't have to think about it, you're just making something. So maybe they're better. But also I just figure you don't have time to get tired of your own stuff if you've only heard it twice. If you listen to it 200 times in the process..

The last project that I did that I sent you, it was just a very impromptu jam where this friend of mine and



Minette Strahan-Ross and Eric Mast Collab, 2011

I went to this lathe cutter, and we brought along a circuit bent Casio and a toy turntable and a broken Bop-It toy and a cigar box and a guitar, and we just sat down and had no idea what we were gonna do, and we just made a bunch of noise, and we were like monkeys picking up these objects, messing with them. I remember the whole time thinking, this is bullshit, this is just bogus, this isn't even music, it's just a bunch of noise. But there were certain times when it actually became music and musical in a purely accidental way, and I think just through the process of recording and being able to play something back and have it affect you each time kind of differently; and it sort of becomes bigger through that process of listening to it again and again, and kind of studying it. I think that's really interesting to me, taking something that's not necessarily musical or even trying to be musical and that accidentally, through that process of repetition and study, that even the ritual of etching it on to vinyl, just sort of elevated it.

Well it becomes more of a process too, the experience. Because there's a different type of listening experience and a different type of person too that's gonna get something out of that. Not everyone wants to hear that, a lot of people would just want to put on the Men at Work cassette instead. It's just a different type of listening experience for a different audience. And sometimes I want to listen to that, and sometimes I would be totally into listening to the Men at Work cassette. Because it's like a different mindset. A different thing. I feel like there was definitely a time when I was way more into that because it was a super crazy avant garde record, you can buy that record and love it, but you might only need to listen to it once every two years, you might be fully happy with that experience, because it's a different type of listening experience, and you have to pay more attention, and it's more involved. Where as the Men at

Work cassette you know the songs or whatever, you can put it in the background, you let it play, it does it's thing, you can leave the room, you don't care. I mean, you can do that with any kind of music but, I don't know, there's just so many different directions you can go.

Another thing that I'm kind of playing with is this idea of everybody kind of being able to make their own records, so I have this idea of a record label that would exist as an online entity where you could upload a file and make a one-off record of any kind.

Oh yeah, like the book publishing thing.

YouTube and everything out there right now is about everybody kind of having a voice and being able to express whatever, and people who are like comedians or record critics, or whatever, everybody's got their own channel.

But there's no rock critics anymore either. Because everyone's the critic now.

You mean so there's no really good writers who really get it?

Well, no-one can afford to pay writers, so there's no point in them honing their craft.

Yeah, that's across the board, that's really happened to everything. I mean, there's pitchfork but they're annoying.

Yeah, I have to forget about that one.

Yeah I have a love/hate relationship with them. They turn me on to things but then they completely pan things that I really like, so... I almost feel like, I can't really trust you.

I guess it's good that they're there. I just don't usually agree with them.

I'm just very interested in this idea because we live in such a digital culture where everything has become absorbed into this cloud that we don't see, we don't touch, it's ephemeral, and we don't have the same kind of relationship with the cloud as with the books on our bookshelf, or with the records and tapes and things we invite into our homes and become a part of us and become immeshed in our psyche in a more real way.

I think it'd be awesome if there was a site that did that, the one-off records.

I mean, there's a barrier in terms of the technology, because in order to make a real record, as you know, you have to go through the electroform molding process and there's a thousand dollar price point to do that for any quantity, but I think where there's a will there's a way and where there's a need and a mar-

ket, the technology can continue to innovate. I'm just really interested in the record, not for the sake of nostalgia necessarily, but that it has a lot in common with the print. The fact that the same thing is happening to print; it's going to become a rarified sort of subcultural artifact. We'll likely still make books, but they'll become more expensive, they'll become more personal, and I think more meaningful. The books we choose to keep will likely be less of the paperback top 10 New York Times bestseller variety, instead they'll be ones I made myself on Blurb that is the pictures of my family or love letters or whatever. As mass media becomes more ephemeral and dematerialized, personal media will become more material.

Yeah, but we're still getting junk mail of grocery store hot items on our doorstep that we don't even look at and throw away, where we'd be happy to use that printing press and



have something we'd keep. So the content is still what's important beyond the object. It's how those materials are used, too. If someone was making 20 copies of a record, who's to say it's your favorite record or you just throw it away.

But if it was yours, I mean, I grew up going, all I want to do is make a record, that would be just the coolest thing in the world, and obviously it was true for you.

Yeah it was totally my goal in life.

Yeah, it's like, I'm a wizard now. I made a record.

I mean, I would use that service, even for a release that I never did on vinyl, I would do that and go back

and press 20 copies of a record.

I mean, the thing that's interesting about that is that Blurb, I don't think that they intended this from the outset, but what ended up happening is they actually created a marketplace, and a market for things, with the internet being it's own curator in that you put something out there and people discover it and they either like it or they don't and certain things rise to the top and others fall by the wayside. So I think in a way the idea of the one-off record could potentially be a new way for art to be curated.

Especially now with printing you could digitally make a beautiful full color sleeve.

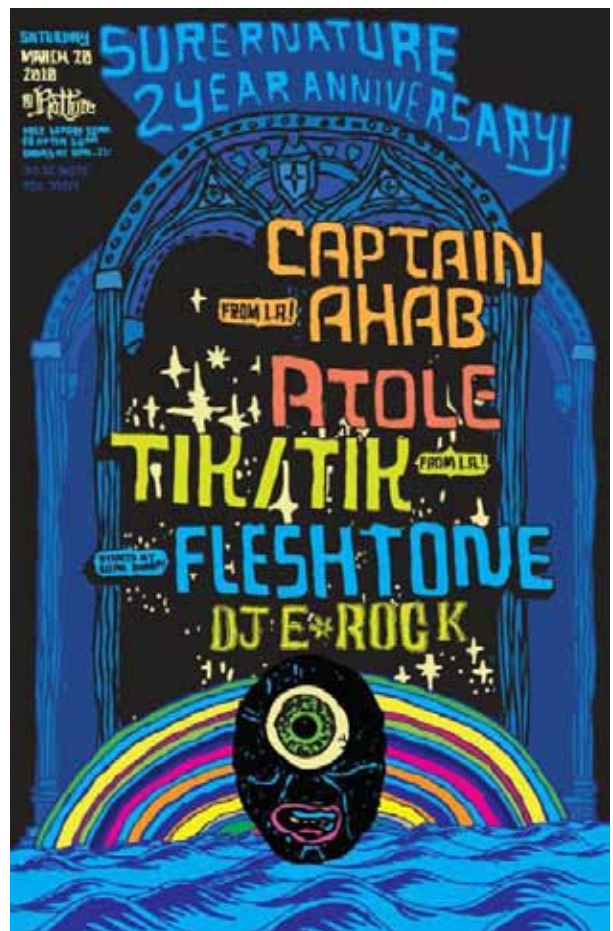


Yeah, and then there's other business models that could arise out of that, there's people who might want to work with a producer or an artist to put together something that they wouldn't normally be able to do in their community that they could do online, they could work with an artist on the other side of the world, a producer, people could be making music who aren't really gifted at making music, what if I'm just a normal guy but I want to write a love letter to my wife, and I want to do it in a way that's really impactful, I'll sing her a song and work with somebody that can put together some fruity loops, and make something and give it to my wife. It's the perfect valentine.

And it's her new favorite record.

And it's a print. It's not just on the iPod, it has the care.

And its about the content. The content for her makes it the best record she's ever heard. Because it's special for her. I feel like that would totally take off.



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HIS MASTER'S VOICE

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P 282

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VICTORCA RCA
★

KRALICE

I'M SORRY

★
WE
★
MET



when you own
20,000 tracks



you are
the radio



signal

to

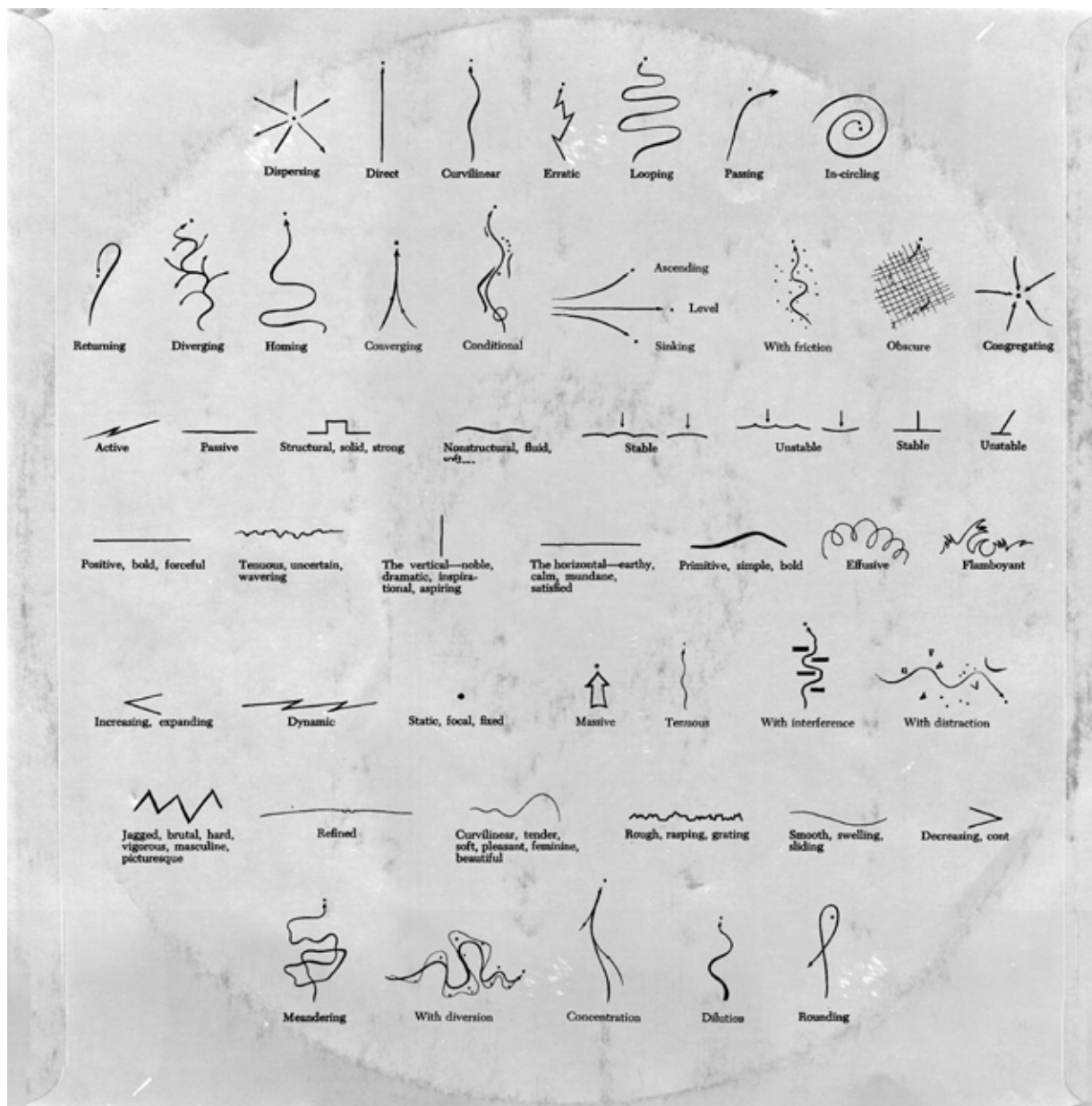
noise

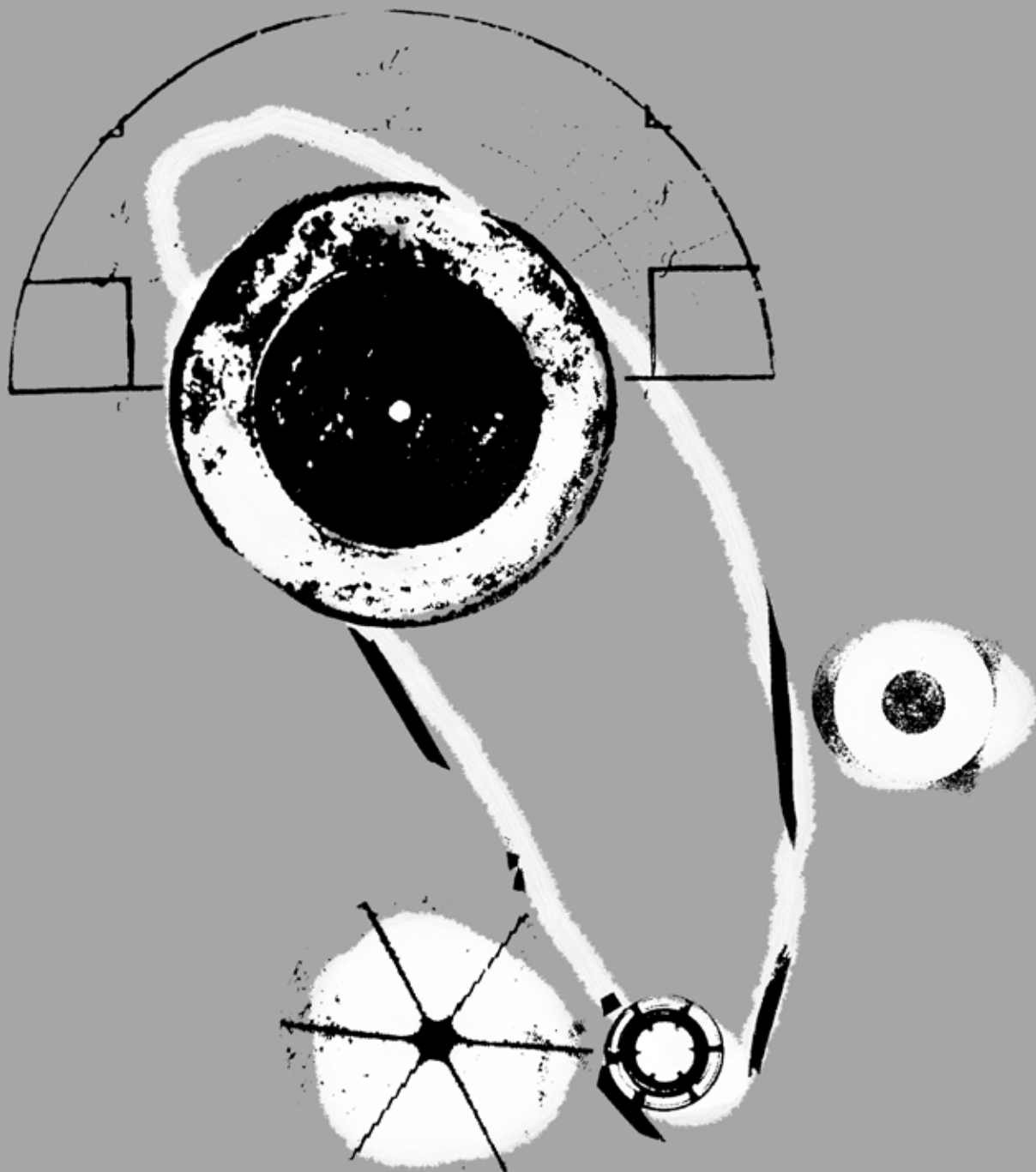
During the presearch phase I began investigations in several different areas of playback media; first was involving the formal nature and qualities of the vinyl LP, chosen as an artifact that engaged both the ear and the eye simultaneously. I investigated the intrinsic visual properties of this media and what was possible; cutting it, reshaping it, painting and drawing with it, and lastly creating a set of one of a kind lathe cut records which investigated the potentials of live, unedited performance using musical and non-musical objects in a primitive noise based conversation between humans and machines.

My goals were to find ways for these two senses to speak to one another, using formal attributes which correlate; sound in the time domain and image in the spacial realm.

At the beginning of the Thesis term, I began looking at ways I might deal with the sharing of common language between image and sound.

I arrived at the possibility of using gesture as a medium however I quickly abandoned this, realizing it's nature as somewhat arbitrary and subject to interpretation.





I became interested in the shared language of these machines, the roundness of the mechanisms which kept the linear movement of the content moving through it's various stations, the play head which took the magnetic particles arranged just so, and transforming them into sound waves.

// PEOPLE AND CULTURE: MASS TO PERSONAL MEDIA

There is an incestuous relationship between the personally mediated 'record' and the mass mediated artifact of consumer culture, and the roles each have played throughout history, leading up to (and including) our current climate. This constant interplay makes for the most interesting and progressive cultures, one where the outliers are always reinvigorating and injecting new forms and practices into the center.

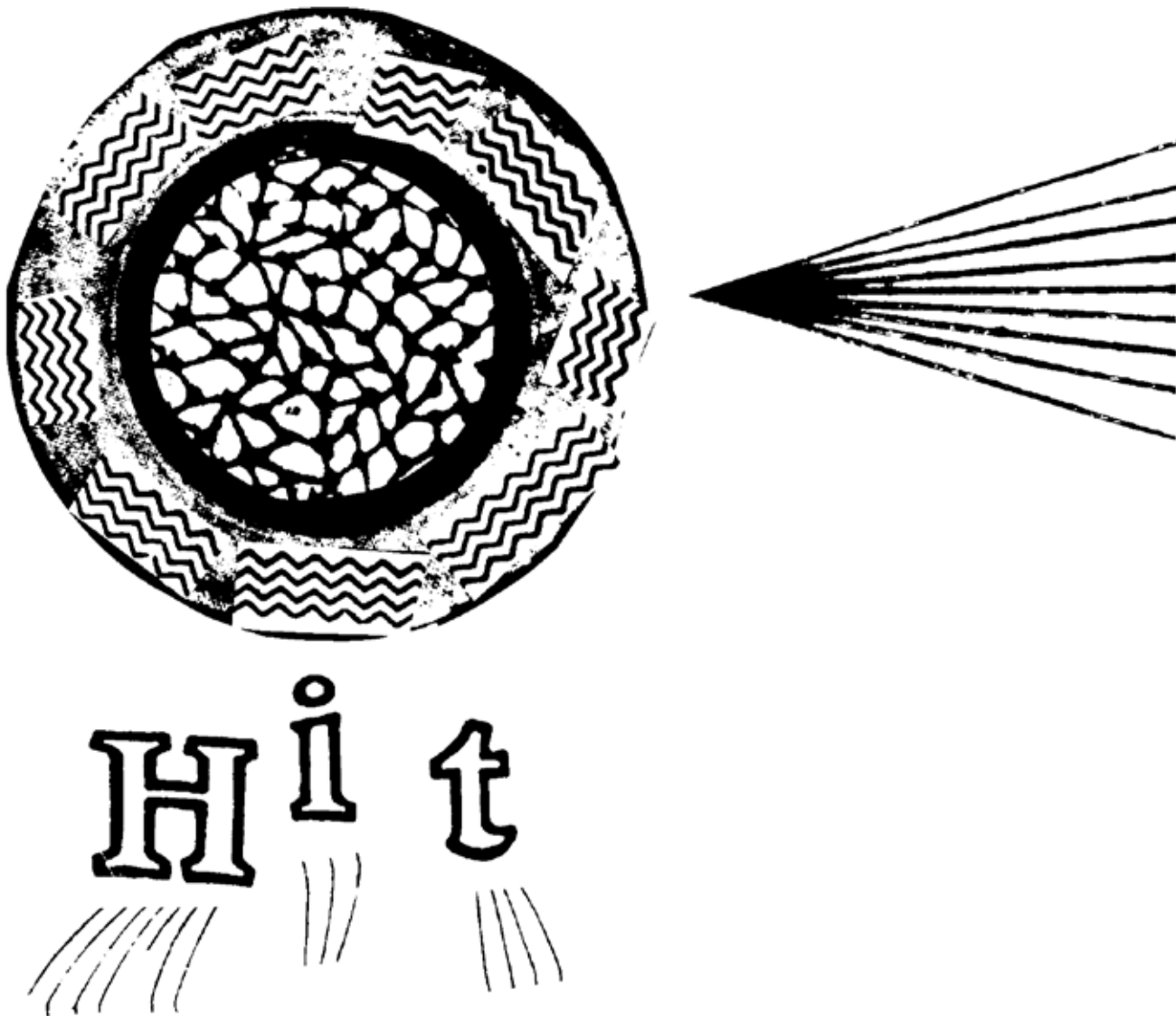
Radio began with hobbyists in their garages & then moved to 'mass mediated' culture when advertisers discovered there was big money to be made.

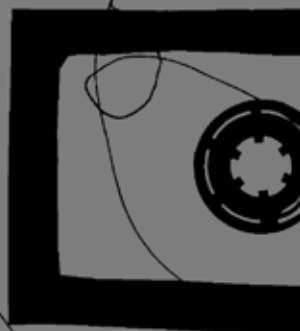


I examined the balance of the personally mediated into mass-mediated culture and the concept of the "HIT" corresponding to the actual physical nature of sound itself. Sean Ross, 2011

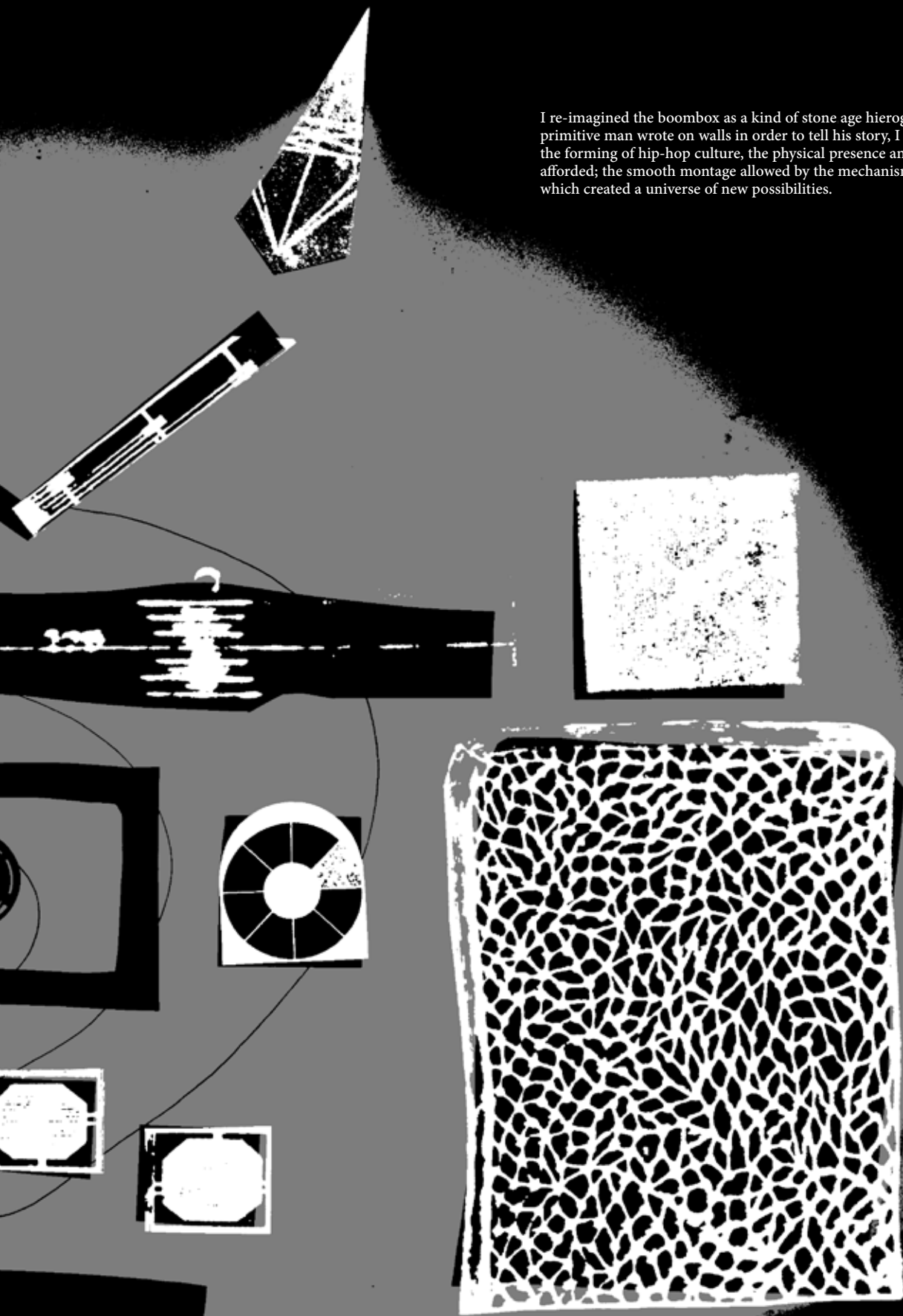
signal to noise

Throughout history there has been a constant interplay between these two polarities, of individuals creating records for their own pleasure and personal archives, and those same media and technologies being standardized and marketed as “mass culture”. The interesting contradiction of our digital times is that finally, anyone can create mass media now. We are living in the time of the *cult of the amateur*. The power of the internet means anyone can, in theory, get a million hits overnight, but since media is so much more disposable, it’s a somewhat shallow victory for those with dreams of truly making it big.





I re-imagined the boombox as a kind of stone age hieroglyph, in the same way primitive man wrote on walls in order to tell his story, I examined it's role in the forming of hip-hop culture, the physical presence and sonic magnitude it afforded; the smooth montage allowed by the mechanism of the pause button which created a universe of new possibilities.

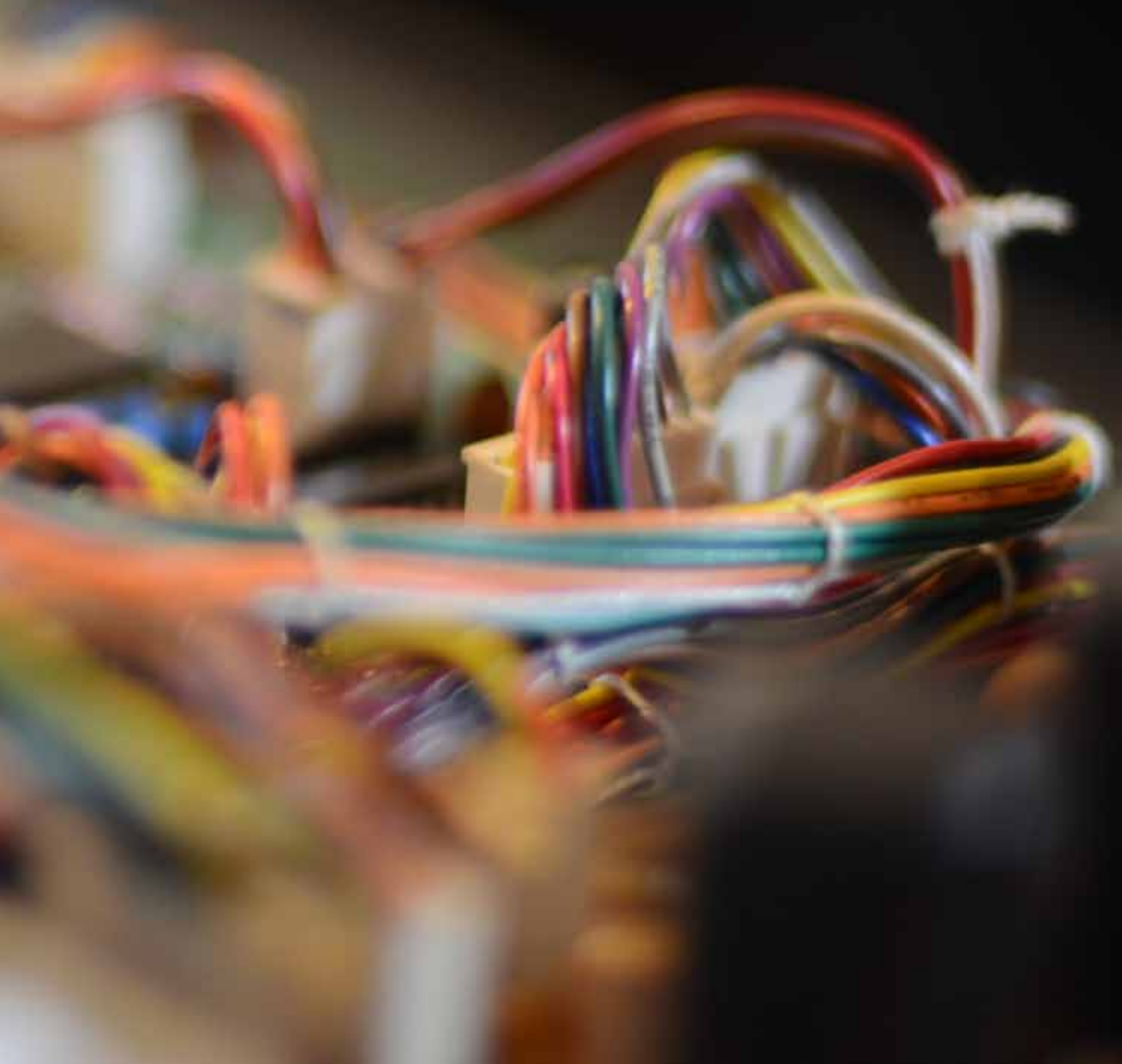


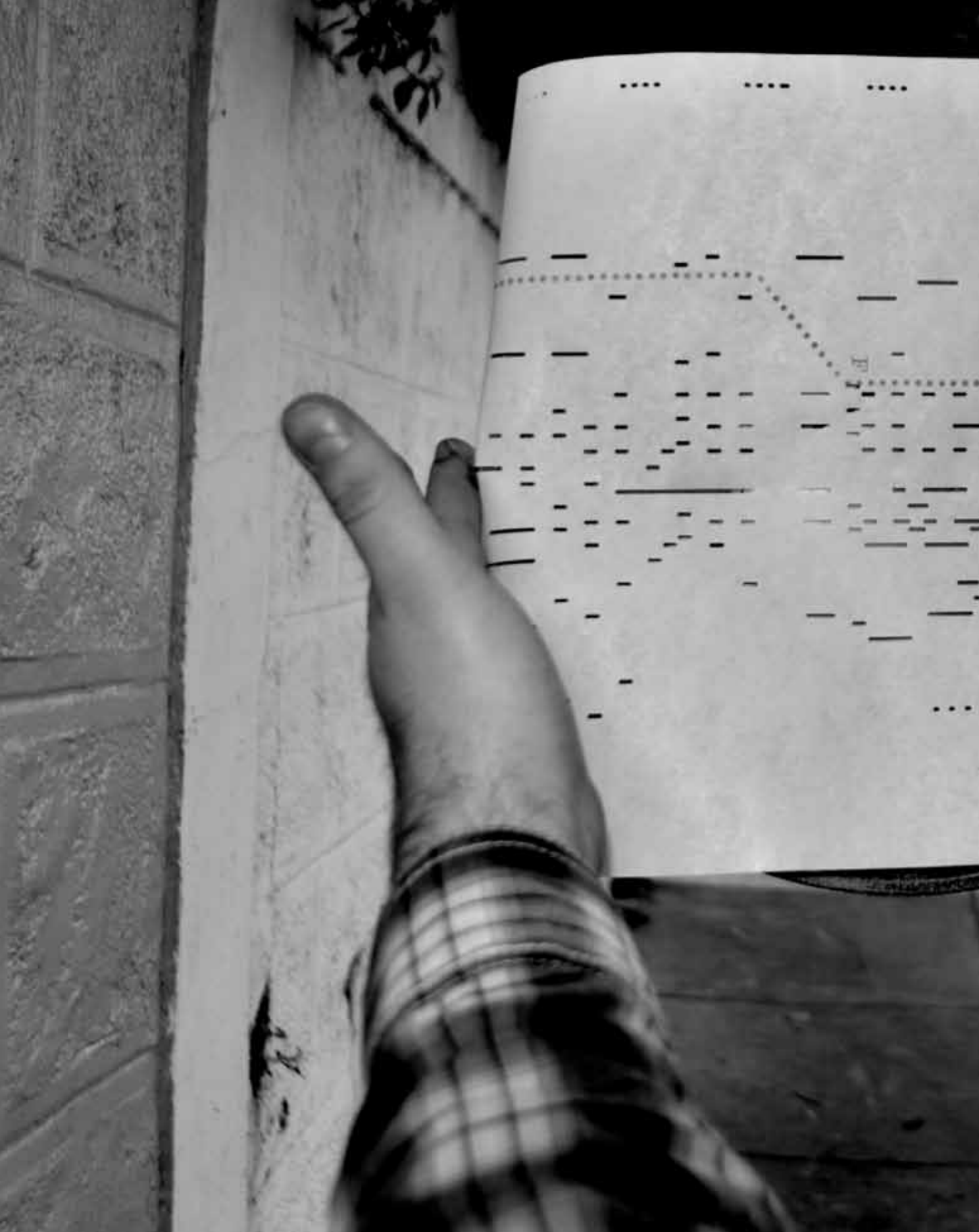


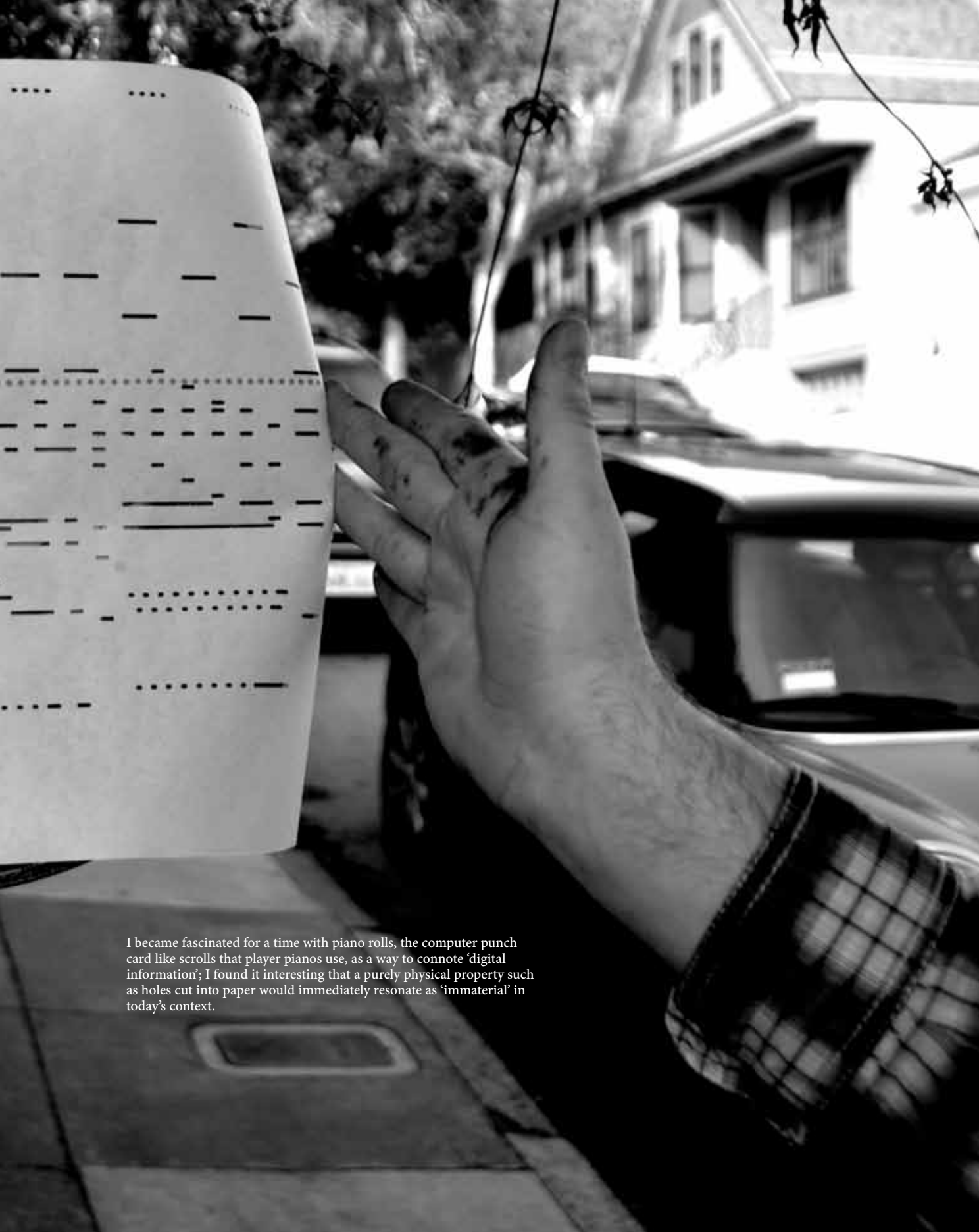
Aspects of my critique against digital means of operating had to do with not wanting any falseness to occur. I therefore opted for a purely formal approach to discovery, setting out to generate both visual and sound materials in parallel.

I began on several different tracks which i worked in tandem, first taking a forensic look into the properties of physical media itself.

I began deconstructing, then reconstructing media objects in order to entertain the notions that physical media can continue to take new forms of pure delight.







I became fascinated for a time with piano rolls, the computer punch card like scrolls that player pianos use, as a way to connote 'digital information'; I found it interesting that a purely physical property such as holes cut into paper would immediately resonate as 'immaterial' in today's context.





in ter view
03

JIM

HAYNES



THE HELEN SCARSDALE AGENCY

I met Jim Haynes at Aquarius Records, where I sometimes shop when I'm in the Mission, a stone's throw from Bernal Heights where I live. I have always appreciated the fearless way Aquarius acts as a curator of some of the most underground and interesting experimental music, not just in the States but internationally. They are not the kind of record store that will carry everything in order to please everyone; they are unabashed tastemakers, unapologetically concerned only with the eclectic tastes of what interest them. They are now more than ever, what a record store should be about: trust. I was initially curious to speak further with Jim about the state of record stores but it turns out Jim is actually a visual and sound artist in his own right, who runs his own label, The Helen Scarsdale Agency. Unfortunately over half of this interview was never recorded due to some technical difficulties; the time constraints of grad school meant that I wasn't able to follow up more thoroughly. What I was able to capture pointed to a key piece of evidence for me : cloud-based digital recommendation engines will never replace the human element in the development and pollination of culture.



The physicality of the medium is something I think people are getting more interested in. For me personally it tied into one big event, I was living in san francisco for 14 years in a small 1 bedroom apartment and didn't have a lot of space, so I would typically shove a bunch of stuff on top of my turntable, thus I would never listen to vinyl. Then I moved to Berkeley about 2 years ago and we had a much bigger space and I have an office which has all my records in it, and we actually have a big closet that all the CDs live in, but the office where I keep the vinyl is right next to my computer, so I'm not going to go into the closet 40 feet away, get a CD, when it's like, 'oh here's a great record', so I listen to vinyl much more these days, and it's just this coincidence that happened around the same time of this vinyl resurgence.

I always loved vinyl, and it goes back

to when I first moved to San Francisco, my UHAUL got broken into and all my CDs were stolen but they didn't touch the vinyl, so I was replacing everything that was stolen with vinyl, I figured it was so much heavier, you could probably carry the CDs, it was just in a big box, I didn't have a lot then but it was still... actually they stole my tapes, too and that was the most distressing, was that there were all the mix tapes that are ir-replacable, and I had this ongoing battle with a friend of mine who... I was more of a fine artist and he was a graphic designer and we would try and outcompete each other in terms of the mix tapes, and which would have the more elaborate artwork, and he won. He made this beautiful tin box that was all stitched together, and it was amazing... and that got stolen, never to be replaced. There were demos that, I went to school with the guy who is in Songs: Ohia, and he gave me this demo tape that never



been released before and it sounded nothing like what he did now, it was more like this mopey Sebadoh type of thing, and I loved those songs, and he actually gave it to me right before I was leaving to come to San Francisco, so I never even got to listen to it, and it got stolen... so there's stuff like that that's gonna be impossible to get replaced, but most everything I've been able to... and the thing that was nice about that was you go back and you think, ah, you know when it first happened I was like, "I never want to listen to Clan of Xymox, who the hell wants to listen to that man, they were cheesy", and then like 6 or 7 years later, I'm thinking, maybe I do want to listen to them, Masquerade was pretty good, and then...

Well I just listened to Clan of Xymox not only but a month ago because I've been doing sculptures with tapes, so I've been experimenting with tape leaving the chassis, and going around and being modulated by things in the

environment, so yeah, I had all of these tapes, and I've been kind of destroying my old tapes, and that was one of the ones I was like, it was the whole experience of listening to the cassette which was copied from vinyl and it just sounds fantastic and it doesn't really matter what it is, it just has such a different quality. This friend of mine over in the east bay somewhere she's like, "I know a place I can get you all the tapes you want". I was like, "alright, find some with screws in them", she ended up bringing me grocery bags full of tapes, and they were all some of the best like, metal, chrome, from the 80s, like all of the designs, like the maxells with the metal, beautiful, so I'm stoked, I'm actually going to start a little cassette label with those and do a little reuse project on those cassettes.

Those metal tapes were awesome, I used to, pop down like, then, 4 dollars for a tape, it's insane.



But they're indestructable and they still play.

Yeah, they do. Yeah, I guess the other thing is that the... when everything got stolen, the remembrance of what I thought that I wanted to listen to, that process I found really pretty amazing because there were things that I needed to get right then and there, I needed to recoup, but it was the trying to sort through why it is that I wanted to listen to that, and re-evaluate myself in relation to music and the history that I had with it, the history I had with people in relation to that music, and where I had lost track of people and those types of things, I think are can be a little lost because I discover music now almost instantly, and it's a very rarely where I have a personal connection.

You're a conneiseur now, you're jaded in a way

I wouldn't want to say that I'm jaded.

Well, you know too much.

Probably I know too much, that's probably the thing.

Jaded connotes a negativity or a displeasure, but certainly knowing a lot is different then being 18, and you don't know anything, and you're just allowing something to move you and you like it and you don't even know why.

But I still love those experiences where I find something and I like it and I don't know why, and that's amazing, and especially if there's something that's like vulgar, or obscene, or totally brutal and I'm wondering why am I reacting so positively to this? What does this say about myself?

What is that south african rap group that's big now?

Oh, Die Antwoord?

Yeah, what's your opinion about them? Because I think they're phony. I think they're totally not what they're purporting to be.

Oh I completely agree. I listen to them as pure pop.

Yeah, but I find it fascinating that it's like the Sex Pistols all over again, it's basically the same exact inversion, of, let's find the ugliest people and give them the worst haircuts, and put the most ironically bad clothing on them, and make pretend they're from the ghetto, and they're not; if you do your research you find out that actually probably those guys don't even really have bad teeth. It's all a spectacle.

Yeah, it's probably true that he doesn't, but I think some of the melodies that they get can be completely compelling, but then there's other stuff that's, you know I mean, hip-hop can be such a disposable genre, and it shoots so high into the stratosphere, and you need all those huge production values in order for it to really work. I've found that the inverse is starting to happen again, there's always the chopped

and screwed methods of playing things really slow and then sort of having like minimal types of things on top of it, but the Witch House/Chill Wave, community that's going on, it's sort of the absolute opposite of that type of hip-hop production and some of it's good, some of it is very hollow sounding, just too much reverb put on it, not enough substance, I find that interesting that there's within culture, all these reactive forces going on at any one time, due to the fact that there's so much information out there, what you're reacting against is almost irrelivent now, if you're reacting against this, you're moving towards something else now; and where those cross sections come together, then you need to start working back into the craft again. That's always where artists who come across something, they stumble across this or that, and then they realize they can build through this sound, and then begin to make something that's compelling, that's where the industry really needs to thrive; if not the

industry at least the artists and the musicians who are there.

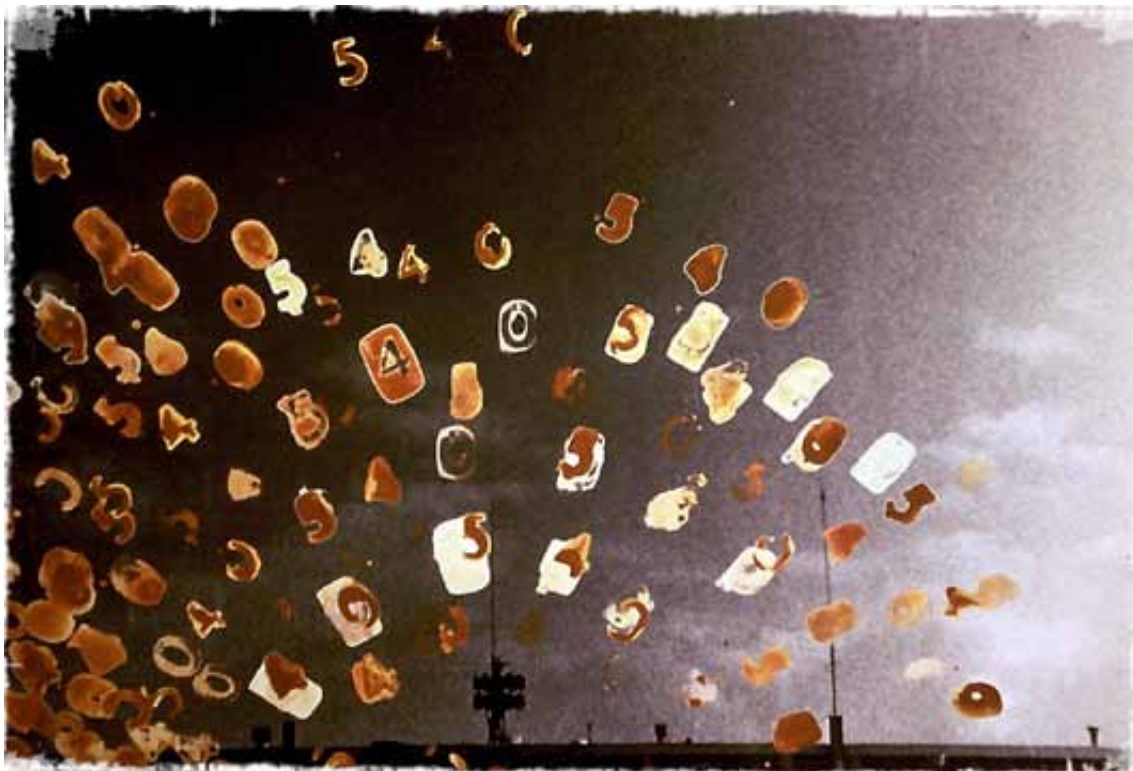
But it seems like the thrust of the industry is still based on style over substance. Usually when I'm the most thrilled is when I'm hearing something I haven't heard, like mashing up and hybridizing things, like Rattatat was the last kind of visceral thrill I had, and it's just so basic and dumb, it's retarded but somebody did it, and not only did they do it, but they did it really well and they had hooks and song craft to back it up, that's why it was so effective.

Oh yeah, they certainly have been, those guitar leads that they got...

But just the idea of putting layer upon layer upon layer upon layer of the exact same thing until it was so massive.

Right, in the 70s to get that same sound, Thin Lizzy had to have two guitars playing the same lead, at the





same time, in stereo, and they were playing it slightly off, because they weren't perfect, but Ratatat can play it and autotune it and Boom, it's awesome.

It's just two guys.

It's two guys and they're great at it.

Back to the physicality; do you think that there are young kids today who just get it in that same visceral way, that the record is just of another world?

I think it was probably the first time they experienced it, it was probably this ephiphany type of moment, and then they started to collect it, and started to enjoy it for what it was.

I think it's also the quest for authenticity in that digital things are so easy to come by and you can

download anything now, it's all at your fingertips and it's for free, and therefore it becomes meaningless, and there's so much about music culture that strives to be exclusive and that wants to have things separate, like I discover something and I don't necessarily want to tell the whole world about it, I'll maybe tell you or some other people that I trust but there's something about it that's pathetic and selfish kind of elitist way of being, and records to an extent can give people that because if you buy a record, it's a much higher level commitment to something.

Yeah, it is... I guess I look at it a little differently, it's not so much an elitist thing but more of a hermetic thing. There is a customer who came in and we were sharing our affinity for Cindytalk, and both of us were of the opinion that if Gordon Sharp made those records and only 40 people bought them, he would still

make those records, and it didn't matter that anybody else experienced them other than those 40 people, and granted he sold many more copies than 40 records but they were so personal and so dark and bleak and difficult to swallow at times but they were to the people who would be able to approach that and get into that type of music, it became ... I don't know if I want to qualify it as this almost like an initiation but it just becomes sort of personal, and even if you were to tell somebody about it it might not mean anything to anybody else, but it means something to the listener.

I think that's true. When I first heard the Bleach album in 1989 or 1990 or whatever, I felt like that band was speaking to me, because they were the same band in a way that I was in at the time, like only they were way better of course but you know, they were like, brothers, you know? And then when they got huge, they were no longer mine. You know?

I can see that. There's something sort of weird about when, if you were to meet somebody who has become famous and you can get beyond that famousness of them and they become a real person, you can talk to them about your dog or what's a good place to eat or how crappy the weather is, or gee I really like Manchester United, or whatever, banal conversations that normal people have as opposed to 'oh my god, you're Neil Young!'

Or like, Prince.

Yeah, that would be... I couldn't imagine... I don't really care about Prince. So that would be a wrong person for me to say anything about. But I know a lot of people would be completely flabbergasted to meet him.

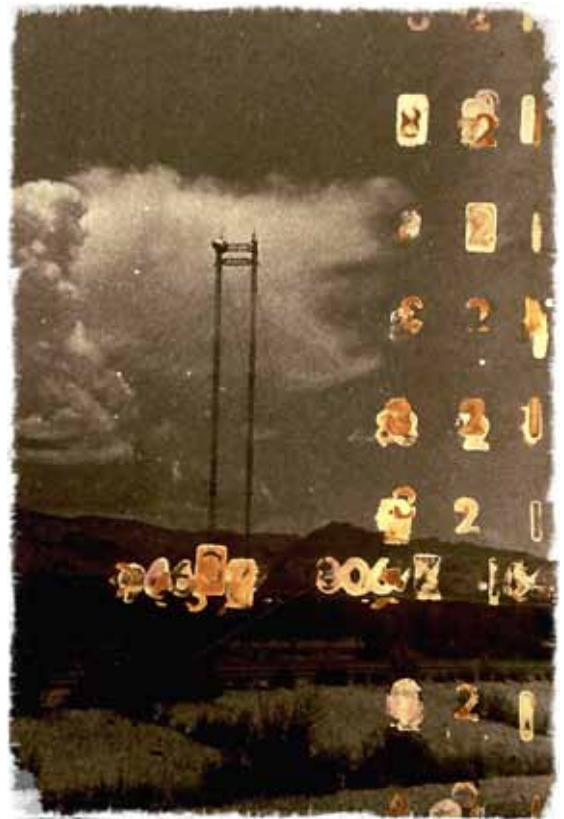
I think that's the sort of danger about pop music is that it can start out as being very personal and meaningful and connecting people to experiences that are dark or just real and then pop music sort of makes it

into this universal meaningless candycoated thing.

Even sort of like the posters of authenticity become these cultural signifiers, you can go back and look at how Dylan would always pose himself in particular ways, and how he would always want the photograph to look in a very particular way, and how he would slump on the guitar this way or that way. More recently and more aggressively the way Emo came up as a legitimate way of trying to have Punk communicate something that was other than, 'fuck my dad fuck my mom', you know, trying to express emotional despair with it's own context.

Now it's just an aesthetic style, an affectation.

Yeah, it became an affectation, and a way to get laid. I sing this way and the girls are going to weep, and then it's easier to get into their



pants, and it's like, nooooo!

Many things become reductionist in that way.

The joy of being the sound artist is, you're never going to do that.

You're never getting into anyone's pants with that.

<laughs>

No, it's not going to happen.

Nope. Maybe in 500 years. But that's a long time to wait.

So where do you see that sort of tension headed, between the sort of 'legitimate' commercial, cloud based music world, and the world that you're in? I mean, I guess they're always going to exist in paralell.

It's really weird, to think about it as something other than what I'm experiencing, because I work at this weird little record store that is able to sustain itself and I'm able to make records and put them out in the world that people buy and seem to enjoy, and do performances and curate things that people go to, versus the very generic way of flipping on the cloud, and so and so, you turn on Pandora and so and so popped up, I like that.

Do you find the whole Pandora thing kind of repulsive? Or insulting?

I don't find it repulsive, I just don't find it interesting. It just doesn't interest me at all. You're sort of just re-enforcing the things that you like; it's like you're surrounding

yourself with things that look like you, as opposed to trying to test yourself against culture and finding something that you react to or react against and those reactions are what I'm interested in.

Well that's what culture actually is, so I think that people who are interested in just being spoon fed, those people are always going to exist, and there's always going to be people that like situation comedies, and who just go to whatever movie is playing, and so I guess when I think about Pandora, I think there's no way I want a robot telling me what I should be listening to because there's so much about how I approach music and how I experience it that's sublime and that is based on taking to people



like you who work in a record store, it's based on talking to my friends, and discovering things by accident, it's based on just being alive, and the sum of all that stuff is magical, and that's what I like about music, is when it hits me upside the head and does something to me that I didn't expect, and so the idea of Pandora saying 'give me the seed and then I will build this entire experience based on this thing that you told me' is just completely the opposite of what I want, or looking for.

I agree. But like I said, it doesn't interest me, so it's something in which, if I'm looking for something other, there are much better places that I would go to and I mean, just flip on, KALX, flip on WFMU, turn on Residents FM, granted I am being a little bit more passive right there but it's the curation.

You know those people are like you, and they're actually doing a hard job, and they're paying attention,

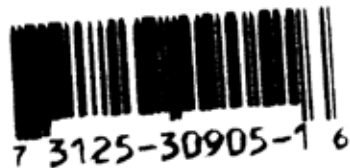
so you can trust them.

I can trust them and then I can also disagree with them, too, which is nice. The other thing that's so great, as much as I love radio, being able to listen to radio all over the world is great, you can instantly communicate with the DJs now and say 'what is that? where is that from? or anything like that, if they're not back-announcing or whatever playlist isn't being updated then and there, that is one of the great things about the connectivity and being able to

discover new music that's out and about. As far as my reaction about how the rest of culture parallels...

I think you answered it, I feel like there isn't necessarily a tension there. It's just two very different ways of operating, two very different operational models, and they have always existed in parallel to one another.





CRO

MAXI-CD FULL
DIMENSIONAL

BOOM

goes

NIRVANA

NEW RELEASE

DUPLI-CATTON



SE-4602 STEREO

THE
Archies
jingle jangle

ROCKIN'

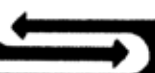
HORRORPOPS

Sea on

RADIATION
ELECTRIC ROCK


OWN RECORDS


NORTON



STEREO

Screamin' and Hollerin'
by the 
YAZOO
L-1008

Country!

RECORDS

THE
ASSOCIATION
LIVE



L.A.

ROCKABILLY

CERVANTINE

A Hawk and a Hacksaw


SUNDAZED


AMORBA

Hi
RECORDS

SONIC


Monarchy

ALL THINGS MOST PASS

it needs to be elevated beyond cleverness

don't be
just a comedian

an object of consideration
besides it's use

need to scale back in every way

let the minimal amount
yield the most results

A black and white photograph showing a close-up of a hand holding a whip. The whip is positioned over the head of a horse, which is partially visible in the background. The image has a grainy, high-contrast quality.

**when a problem
comes along**

**you must
whip it**

// THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF SOUND

"architecture is the frozen music;
music is the flowing architecture..." – goethe

a parallel process



I believe that the separation of the visual from the aural is a false boundary, that our senses are all working together, and that communication designers should stop thinking in terms of one sensory type as being more or less important than another. Our bodies have sensory receptors-eyes and ears-and in daily life they both work in tandem to fully experience the world around us. I believe that the connectivity of the internet, and the multimedia rich capabilities of devices such as the iPad, and the iPhone are going to create new design opportunities for sound and image to (d)evolve to the next level of literally combining and fusing these languages together, not just tacking one on top of the other.

During the presearch phase I began investigations in several different areas of playback media; first was involving the formal nature and qualities of the vinyl LP, chosen as an artifact that engaged both the ear and the eye simultaneously. I investigated the intrinsic visual properties of this media and what was possible, cutting it, reshaping it, painting and drawing with it, and lastly

// THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF SOUND

The tools I used for image and sound making processes - a light table, microphone, analog synthesizer, glass plates, inks, and Magic Marbles from Walgreens, my secret weapon.



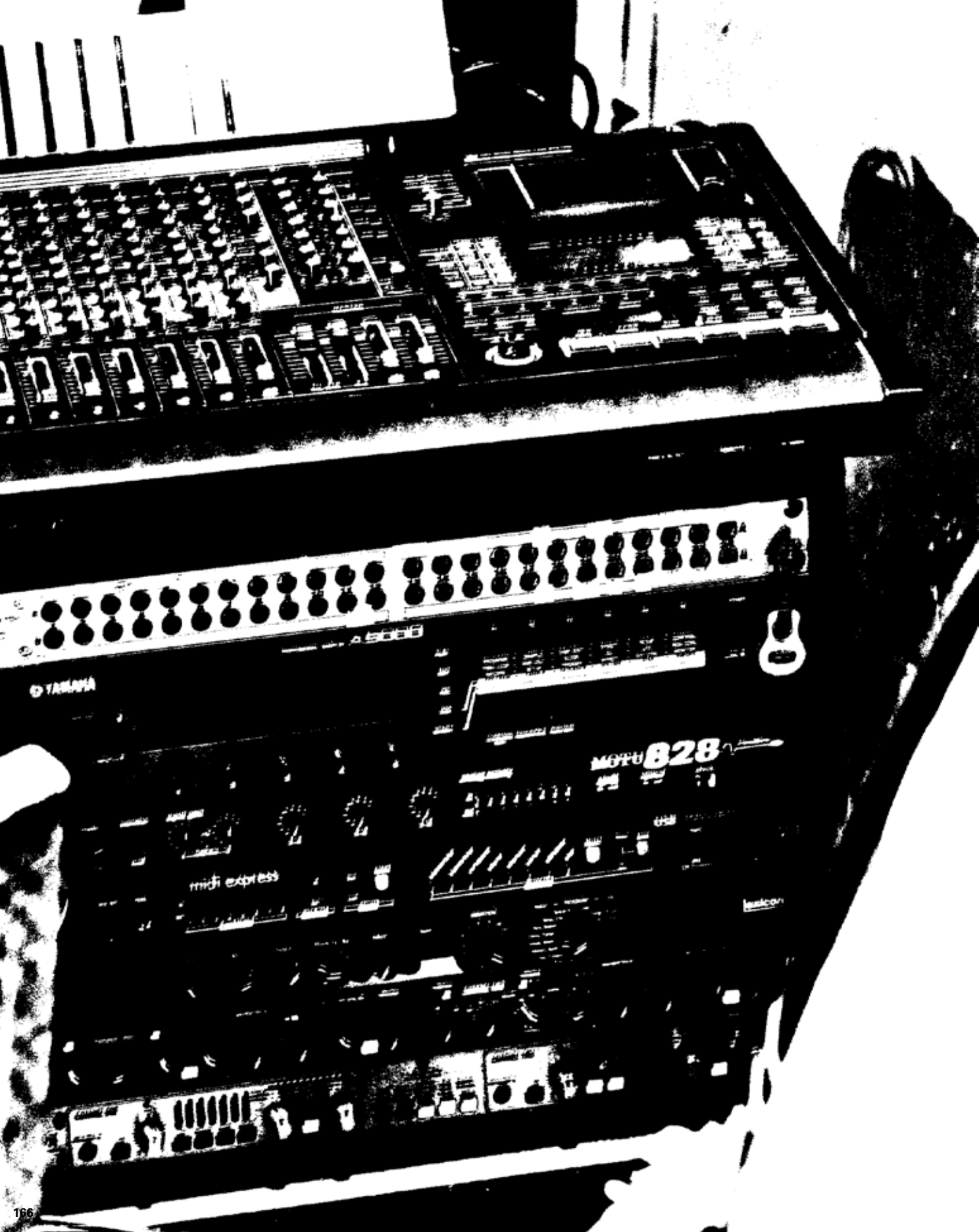
a parallel process

creating a set of one of a kind lathe cut records which investigated the potentials of live, unedited performance using musical and non-musical objects in a primitive noise based conversation between humans and machines.

My goals were to find ways for these two senses to speak to one another, using formal attributes which correlate; sound in the time domain and image in the spacial realm.

At the beginning of the Thesis term, I began looking at ways I might deal with the sharing of common language between image and sound. My first study with sound and image was actually a serial process, first creating a sound piece, and then creating a visual piece while listening to the sound, which was again creating the arbitrary relationships and interpretations that I was trying to avoid. I had to complete this step in order to understand how deeply engrained these habits are of composing, designing, and separating—then recombining these two modes of working. I still needed to find a truly parallel way of generating sound and image together.





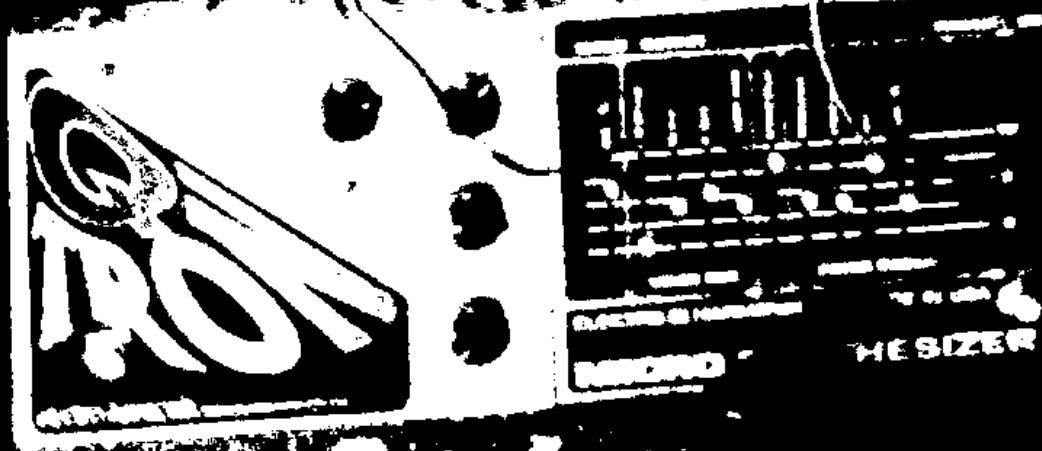
YAMAHA

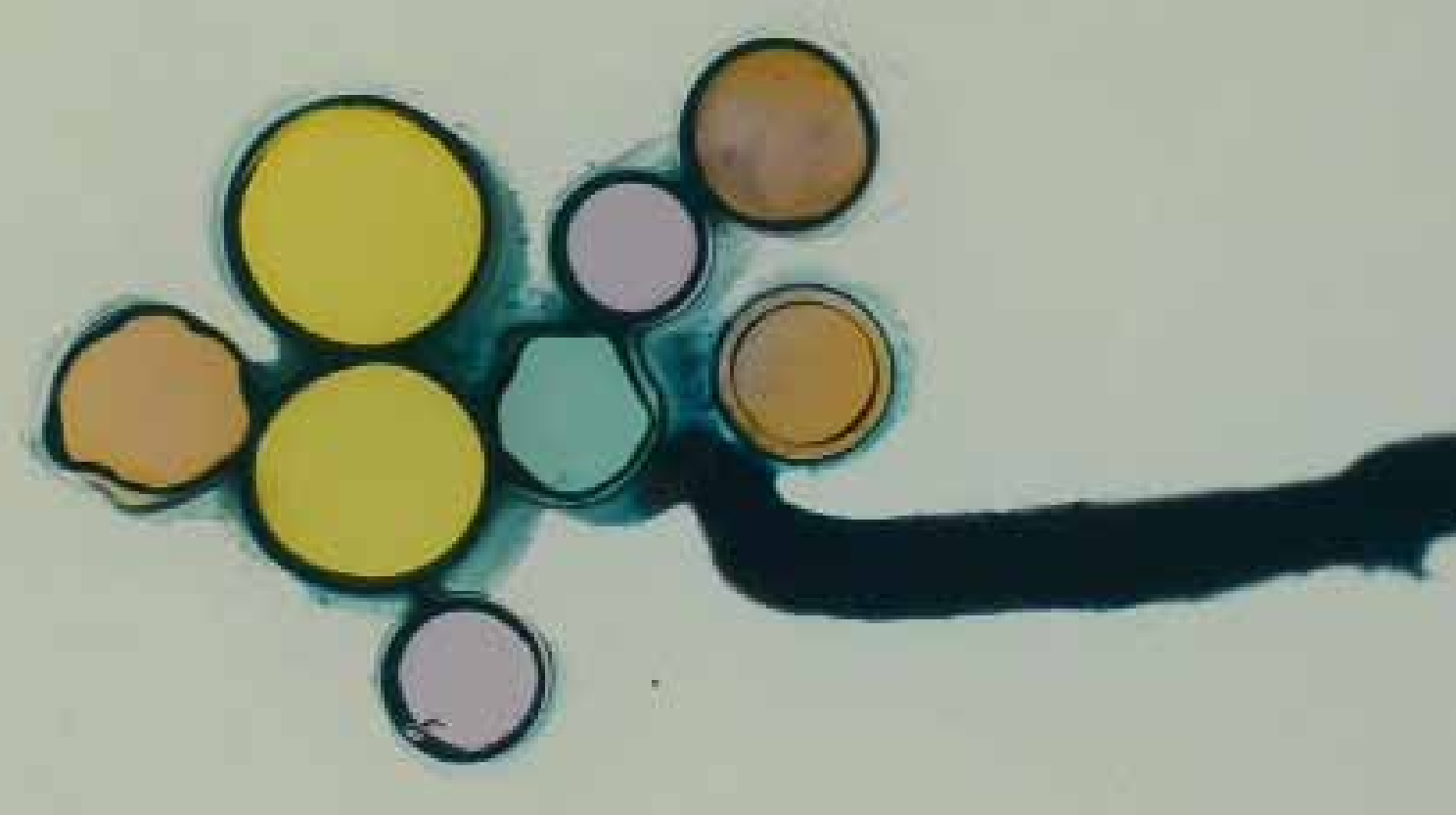
A5000

midi express

MOTU 828

lesicon



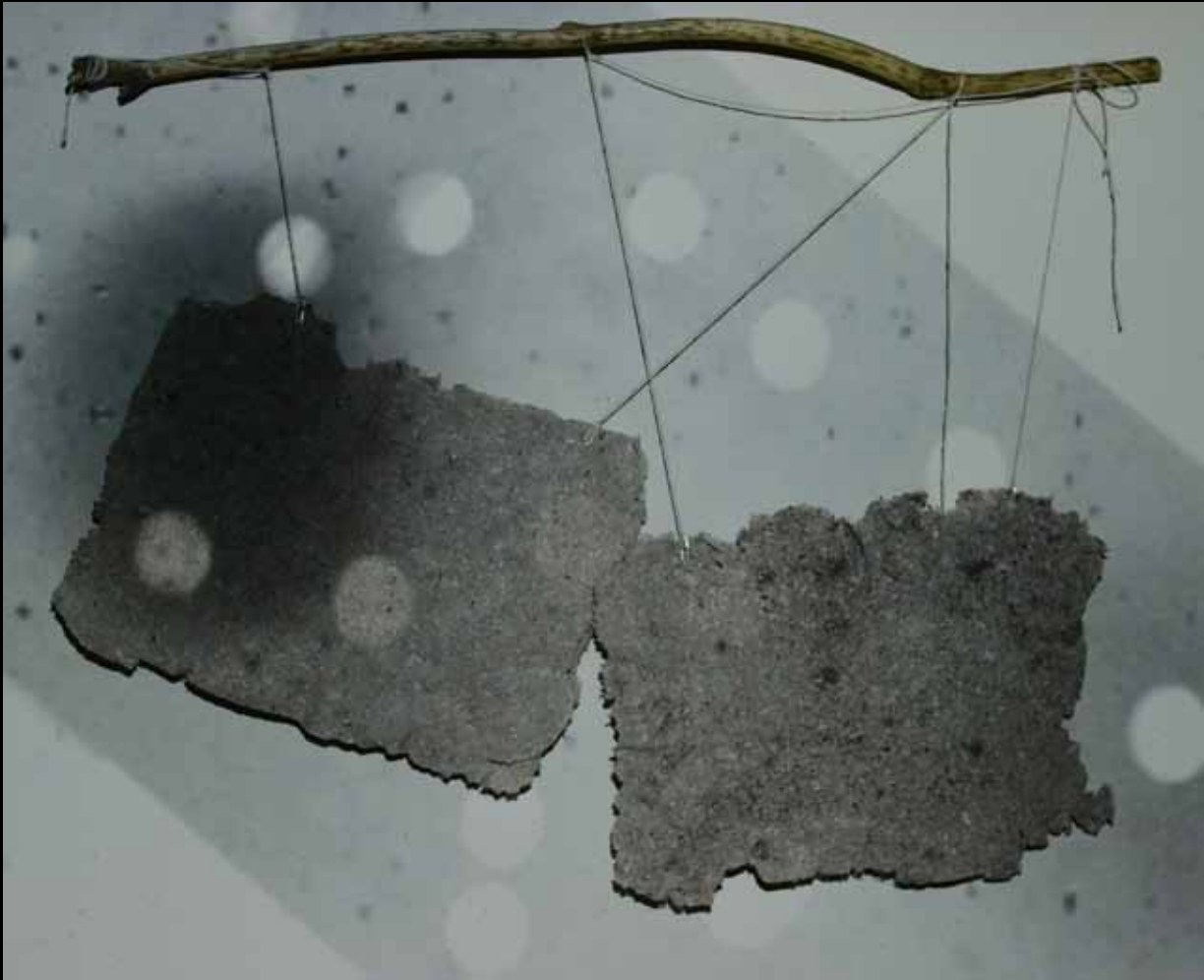


“a serial process”



video clip >> <http://www.vimeo.com/22795679>

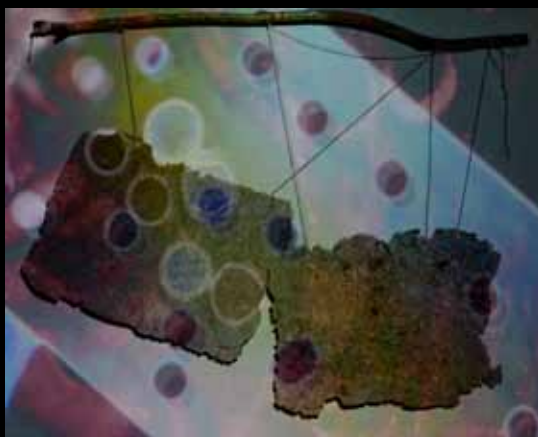
// THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF SOUND



Video clips of analog sound and image experiments projected from Max/MSP onto handmade paper, Sean Ross, 2011

video clip >> <http://www.vimeo.com/22794440>

a parallel process



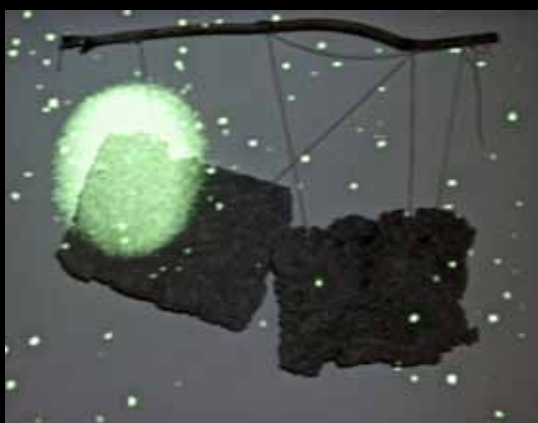
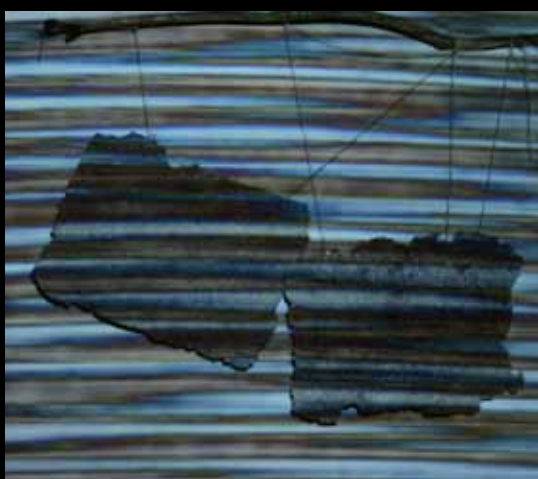
I began truly parallel processes of creating image and sound together.

Initially my plan was to bring these discreet moments I had collected into an application I designed for the real time layering and performance of audiovisual media in a performance context.

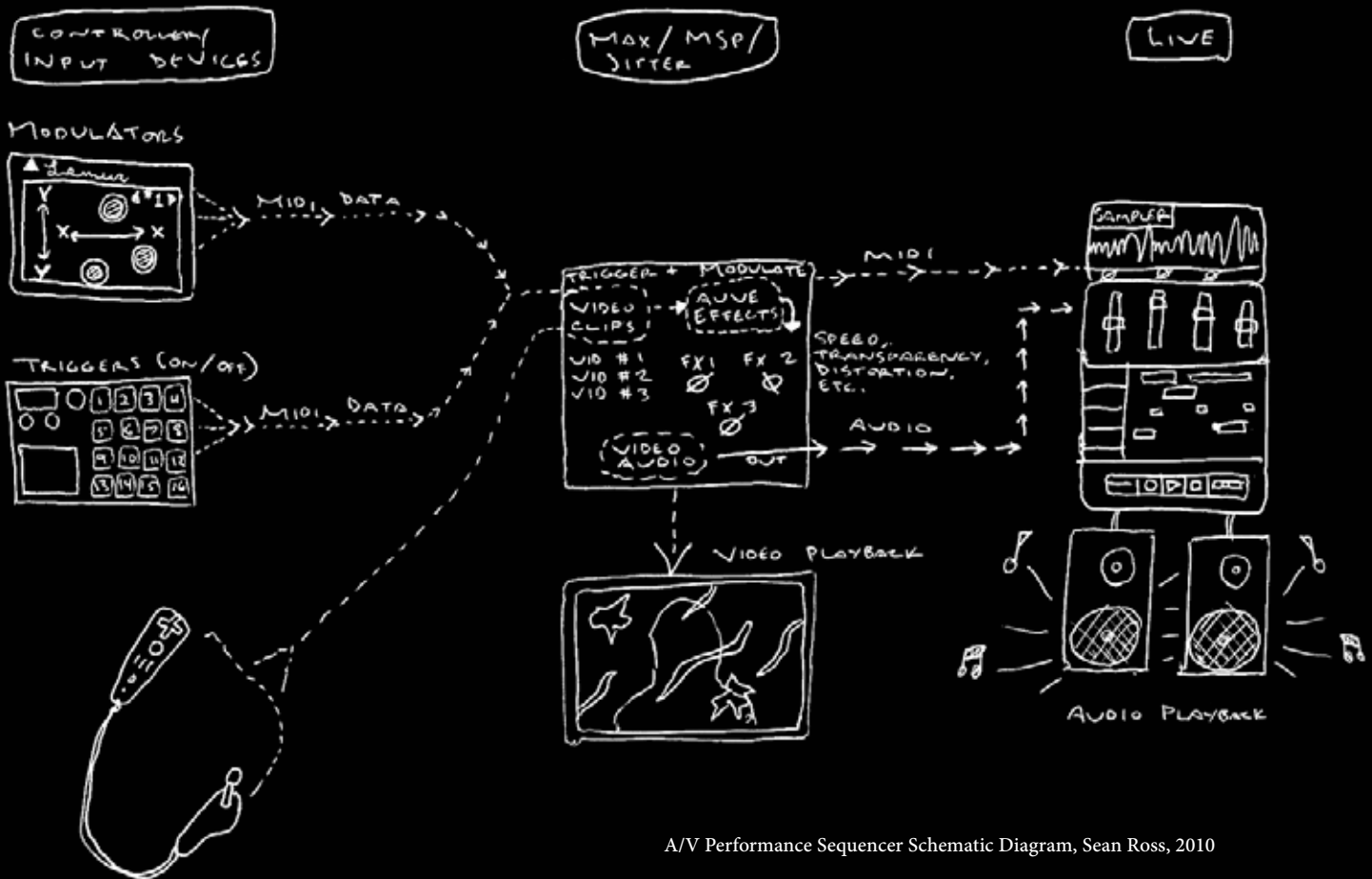
I wanted a way to compose and 'design' with these clips, to play them like a DJ samples, creating new combinations which would allow these moments to interact, however I became confronted with the aesthetic of digital, and the "COOL AND GROOVY" affectation it seems to impart to everything, like a lava lamp or a trippy screen saver.

I began to value the moments more by themselves, and I wondered if instead of collecting these clips to be ground up into digital fodder for the machine, might I just be content to allow them space to be themselves.

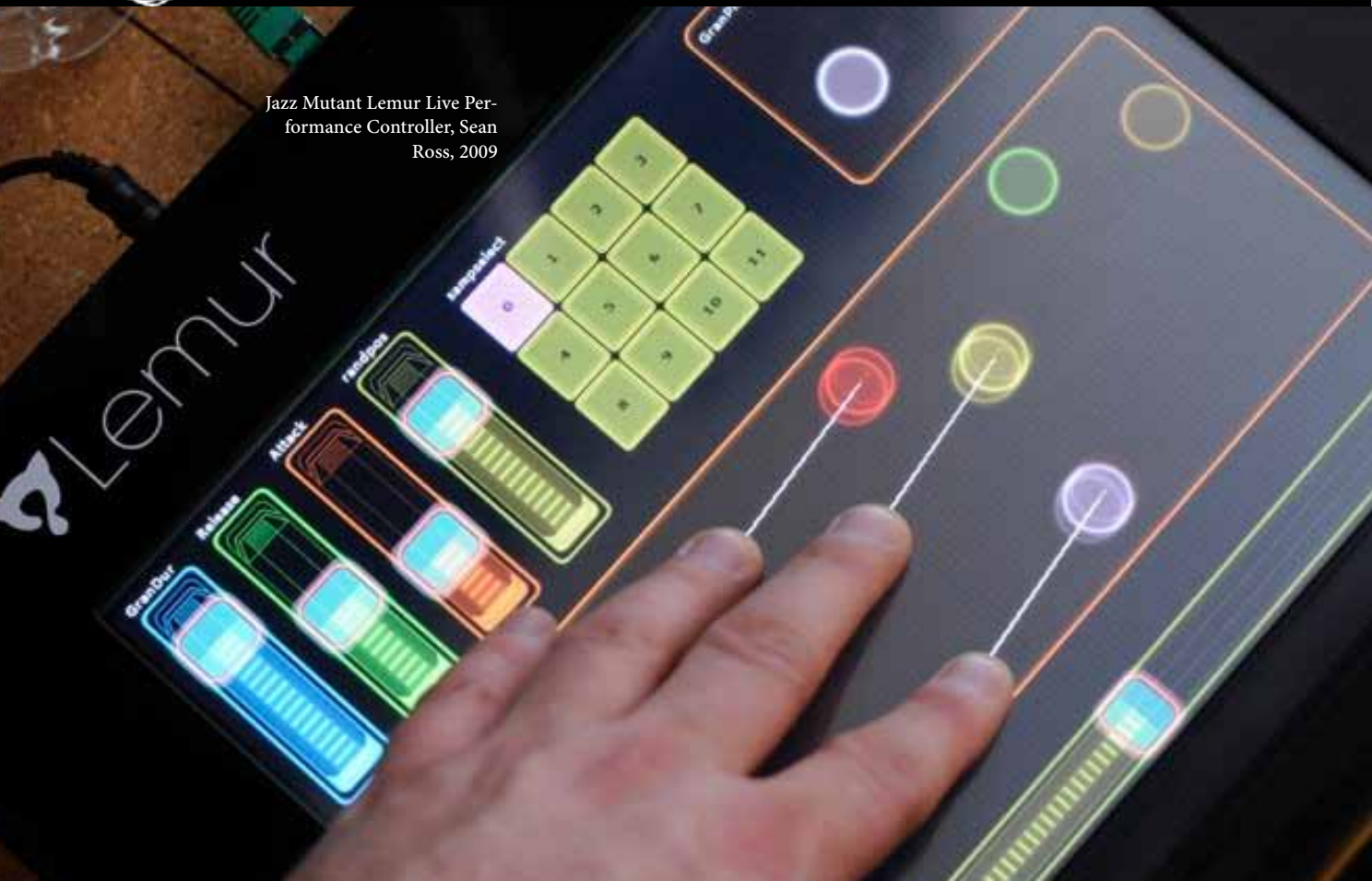
I still struggle with this. My plans moving forward are to strike some kind of balance between the notions of composition and creativity with the fundamental discoveries and strategies of capturing sound and image together as they truly are, in the wild.



video clip >> <http://www.vimeo.com/22794440>



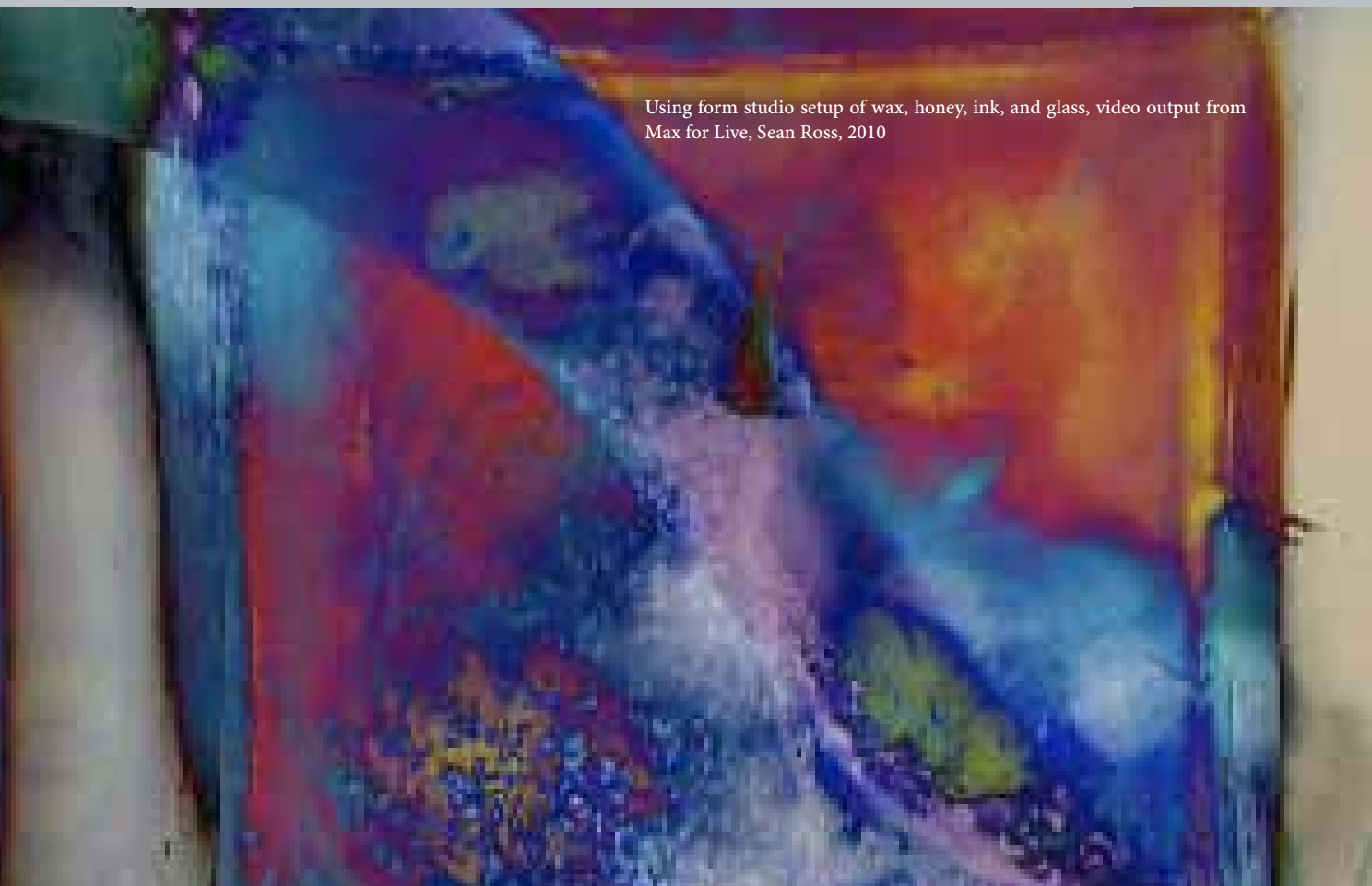
A/V Performance Sequencer Schematic Diagram, Sean Ross, 2010



Jazz Mutant Lemur Live Performance Controller, Sean Ross, 2009



A/V Performance Sequencer in Max for Live, Sean Ross & Ben Bracken, 2010



Using form studio setup of wax, honey, ink, and glass, video output from Max for Live, Sean Ross, 2010

// THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF SOUND



Cymatics experiment with corn starch, water, and black ink on top of a speaker cone playing sine and sawtooth waves at varied frequencies. Sean Ross, 2011

video clip >> <http://www.vimeo.com/22794440>

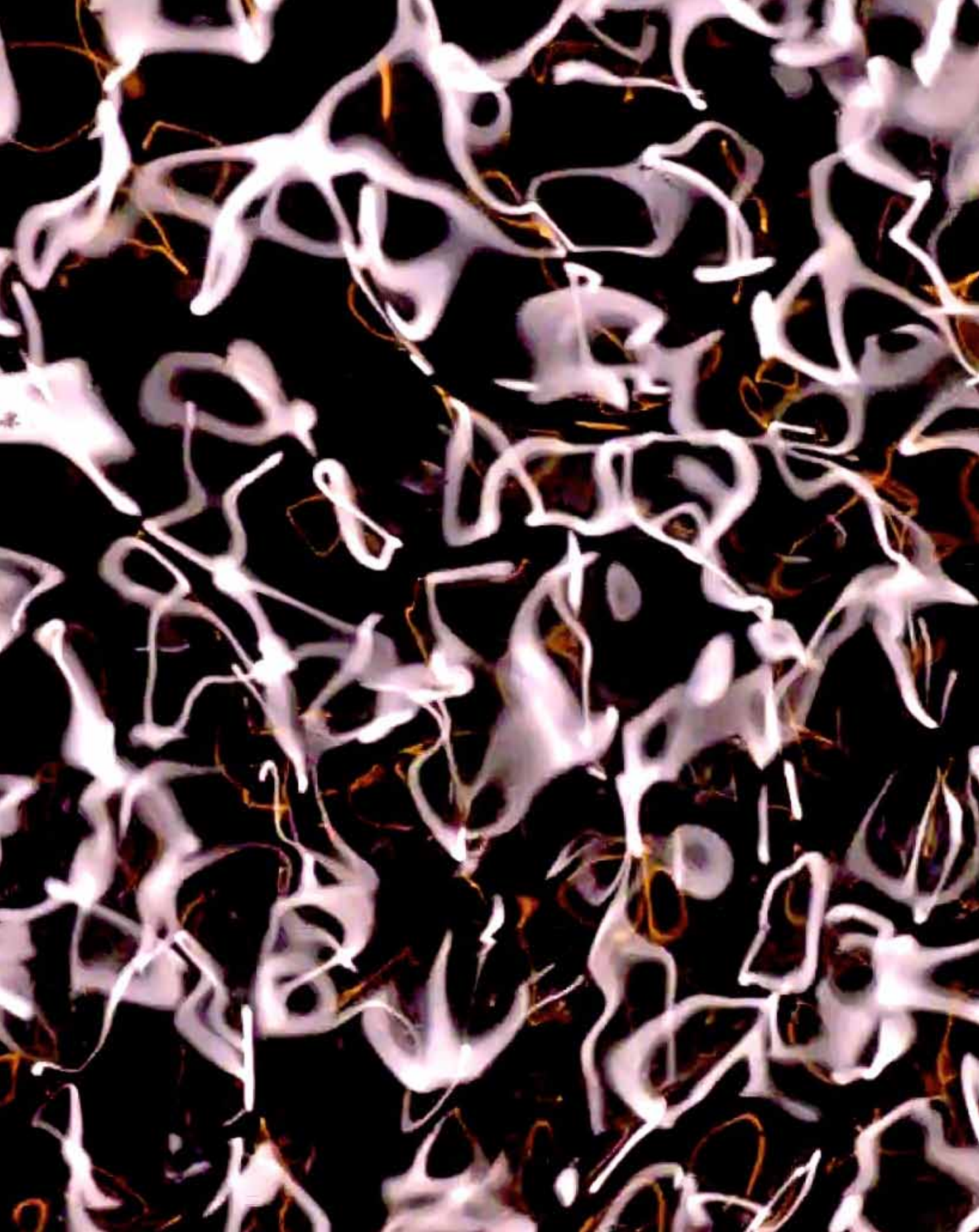
a parallel process

"don't be puff daddy.
be public enemy." – martin venezky

video clip >> <http://www.vimeo.com/22794440>



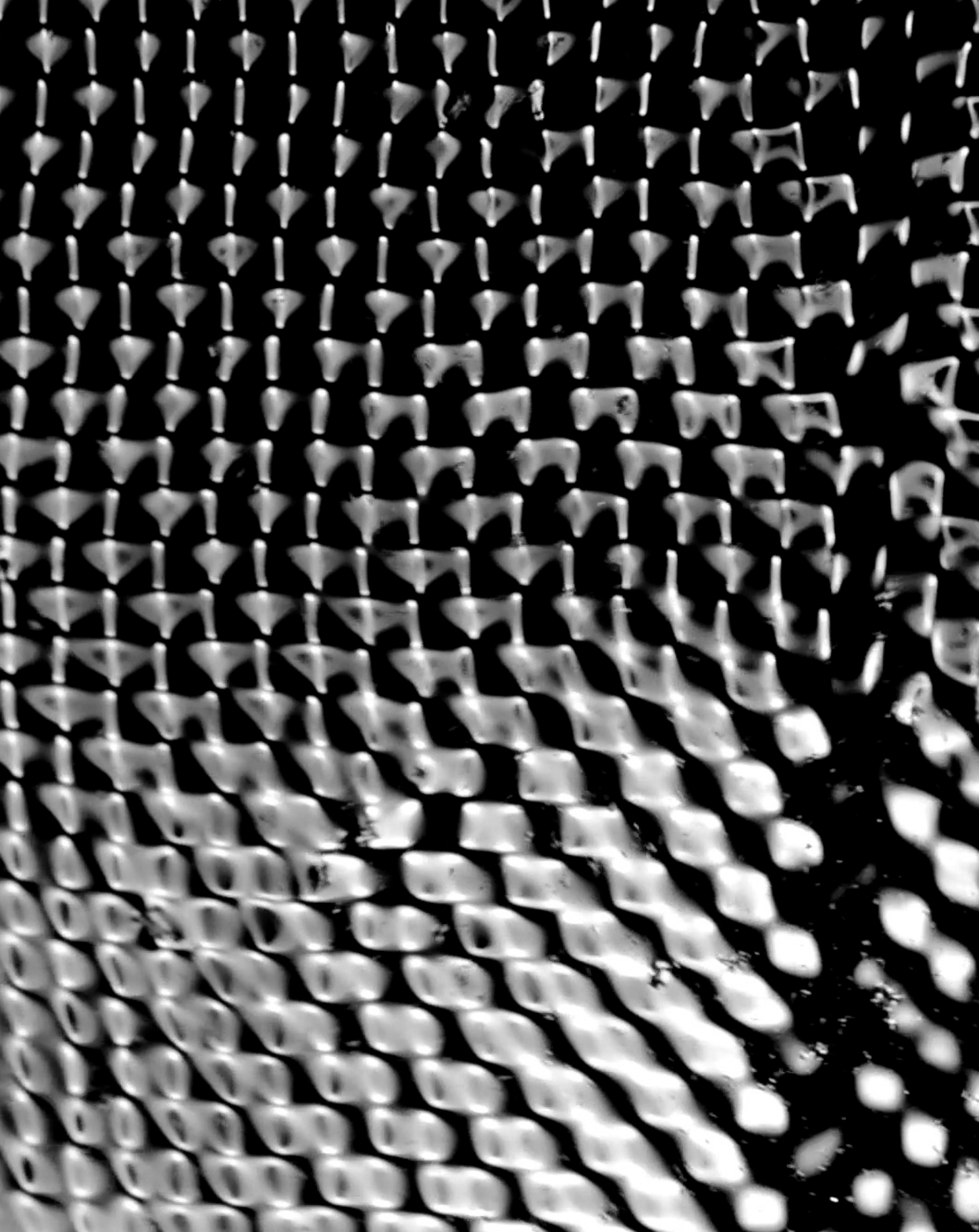




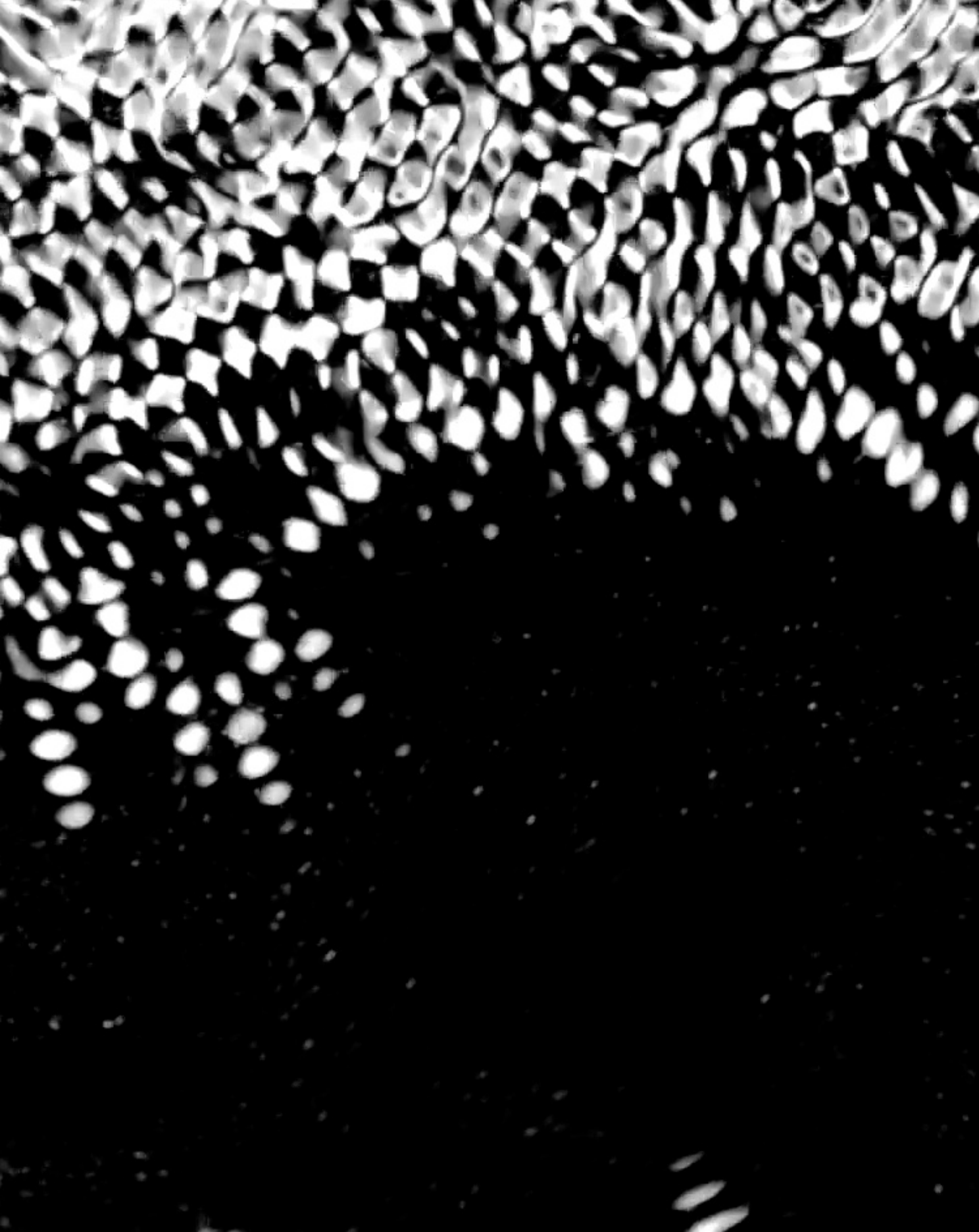


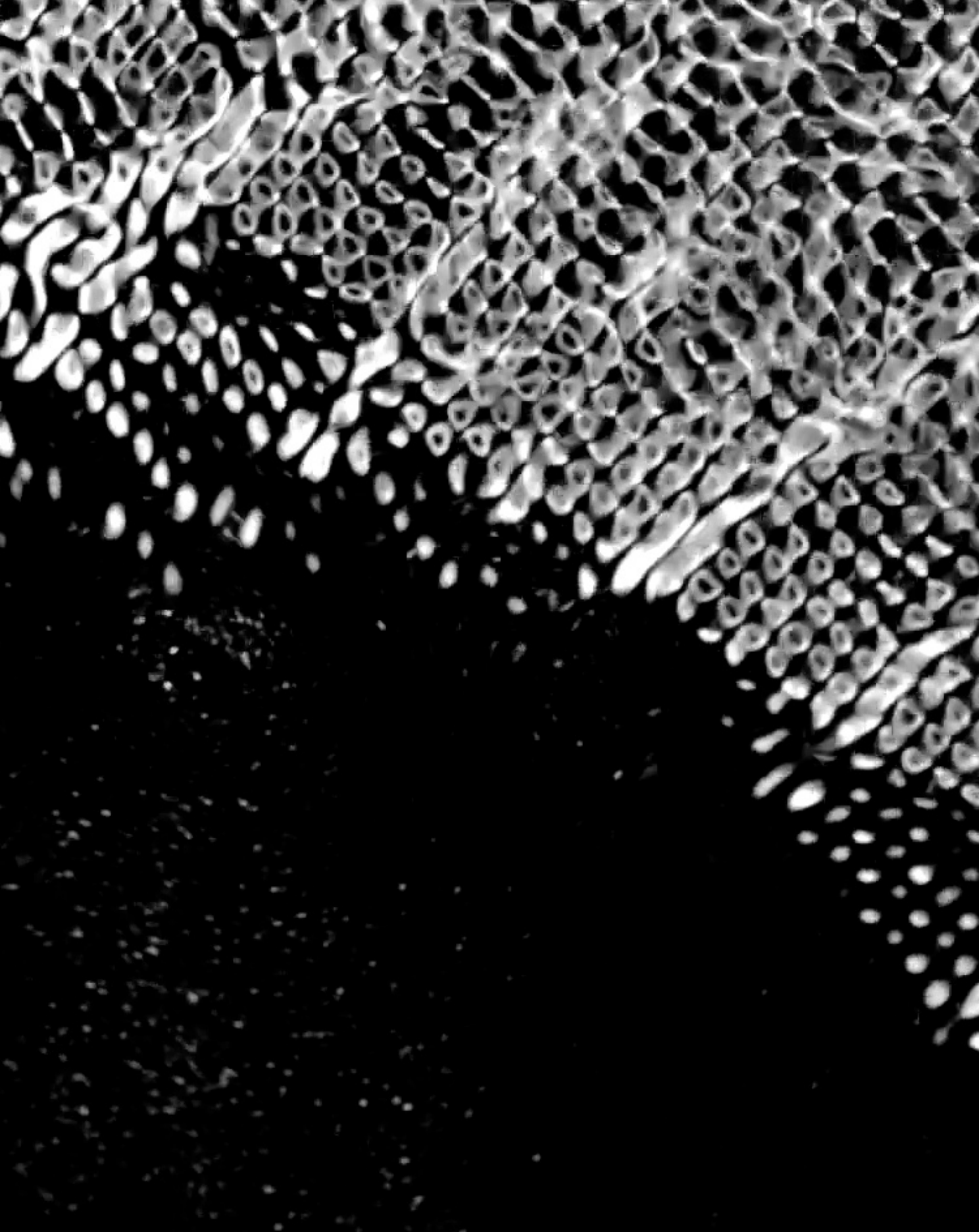


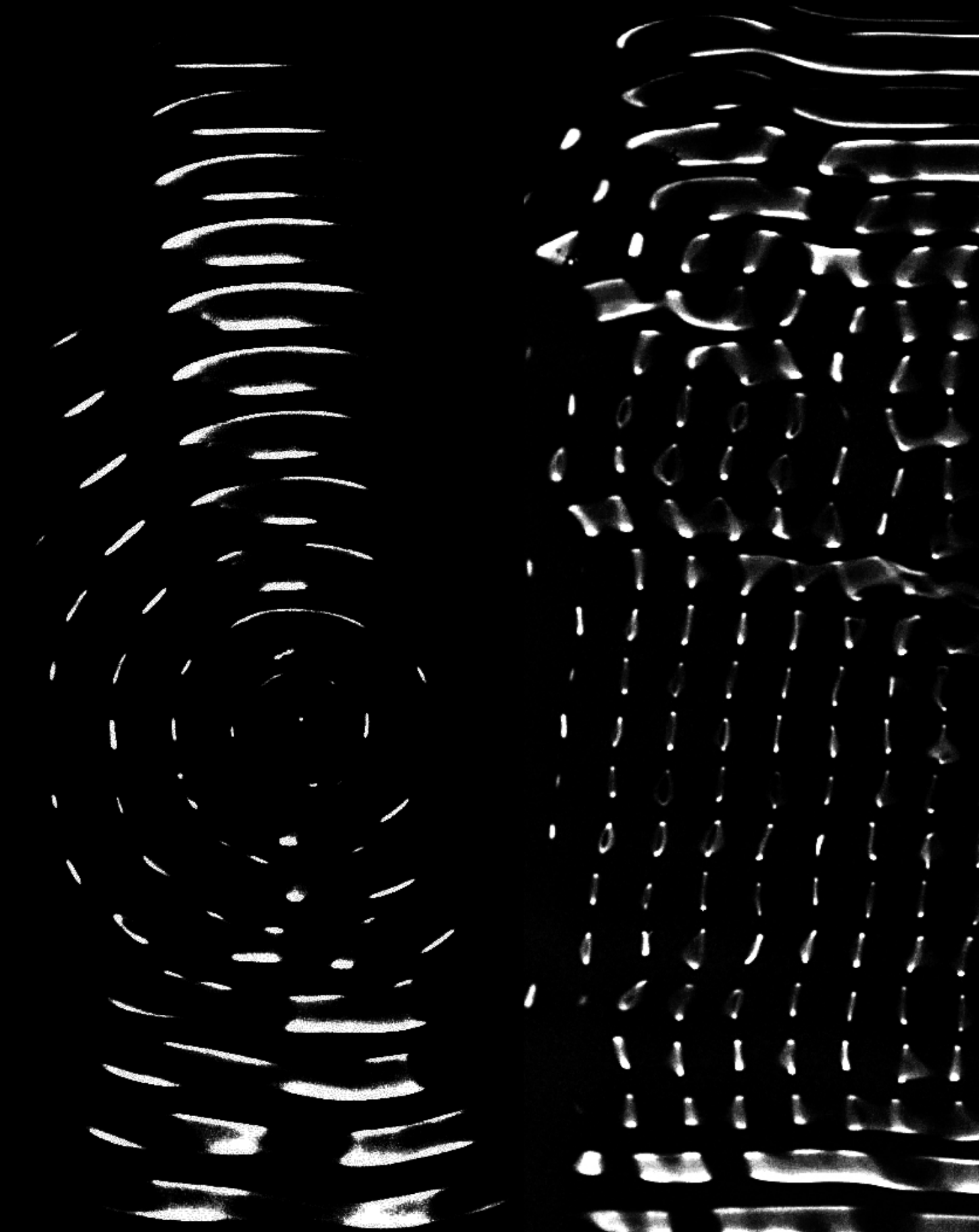


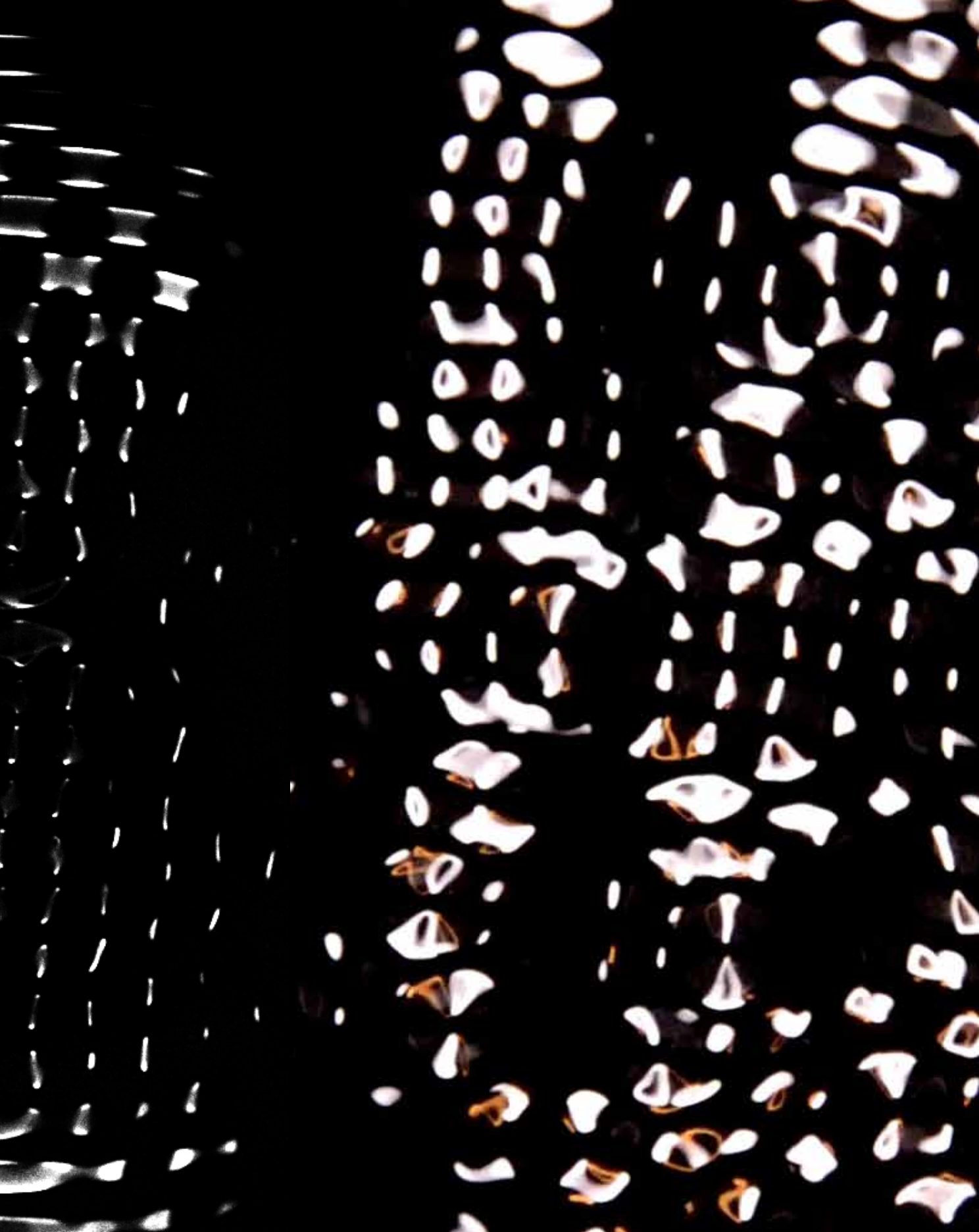


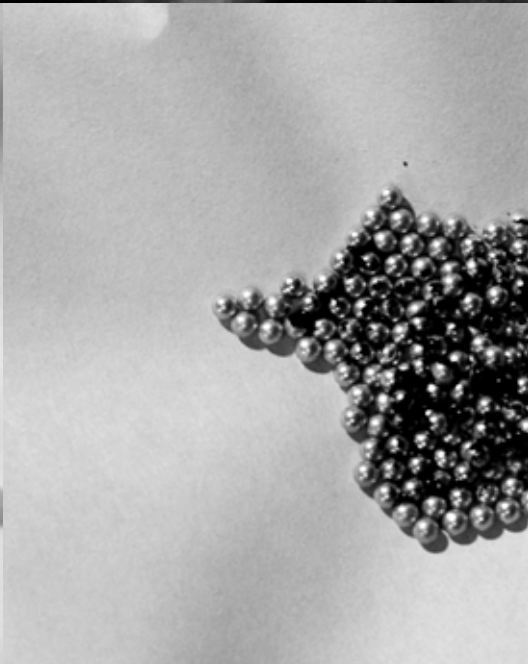
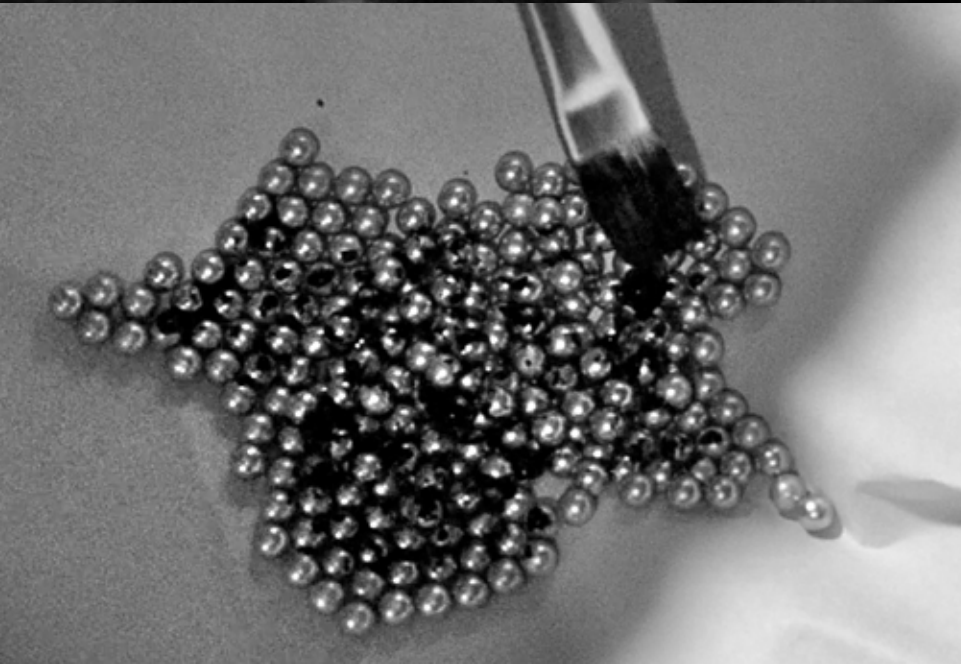
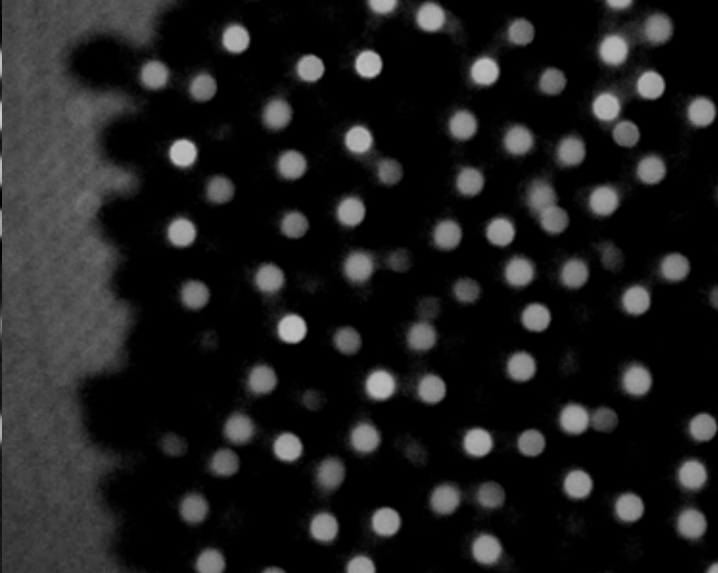


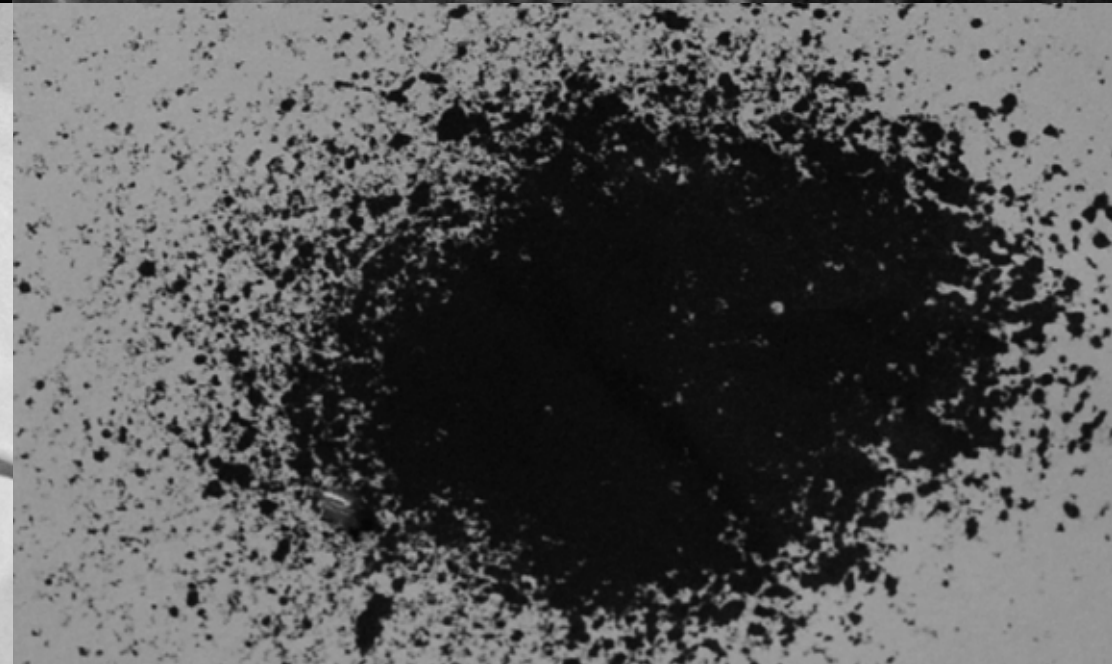
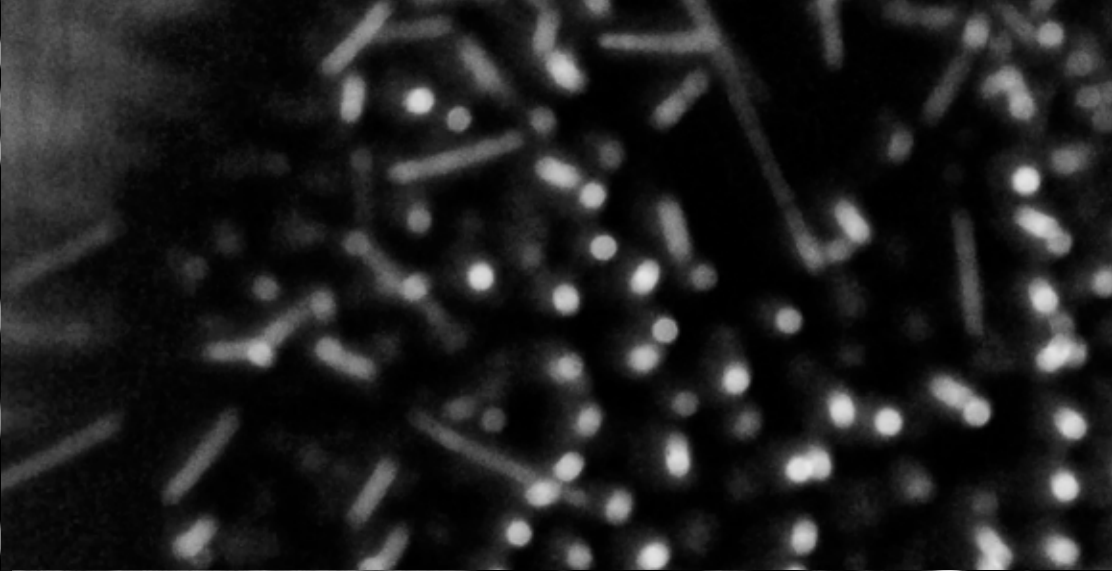
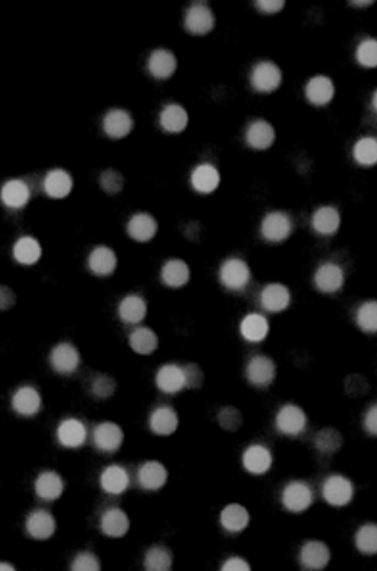


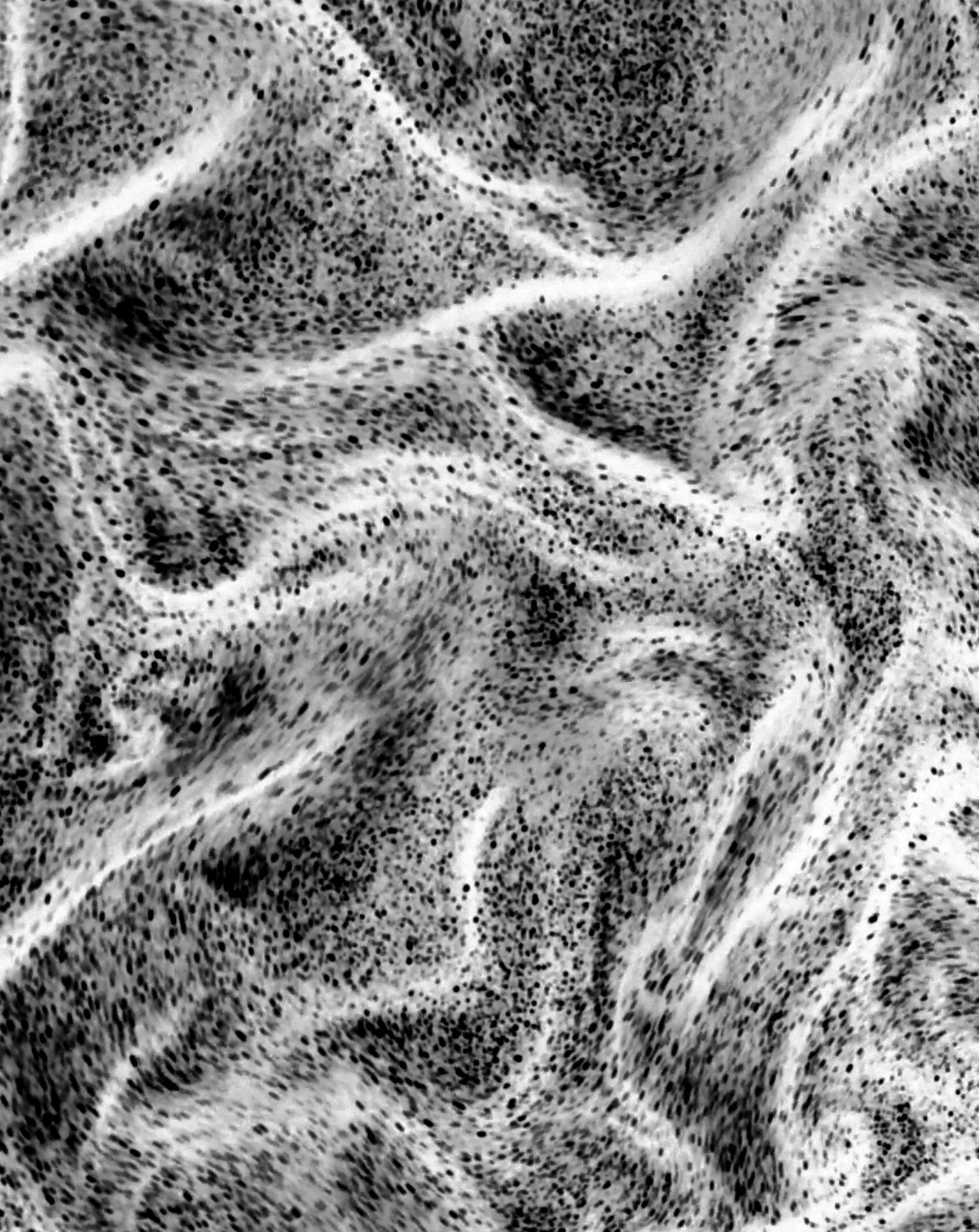


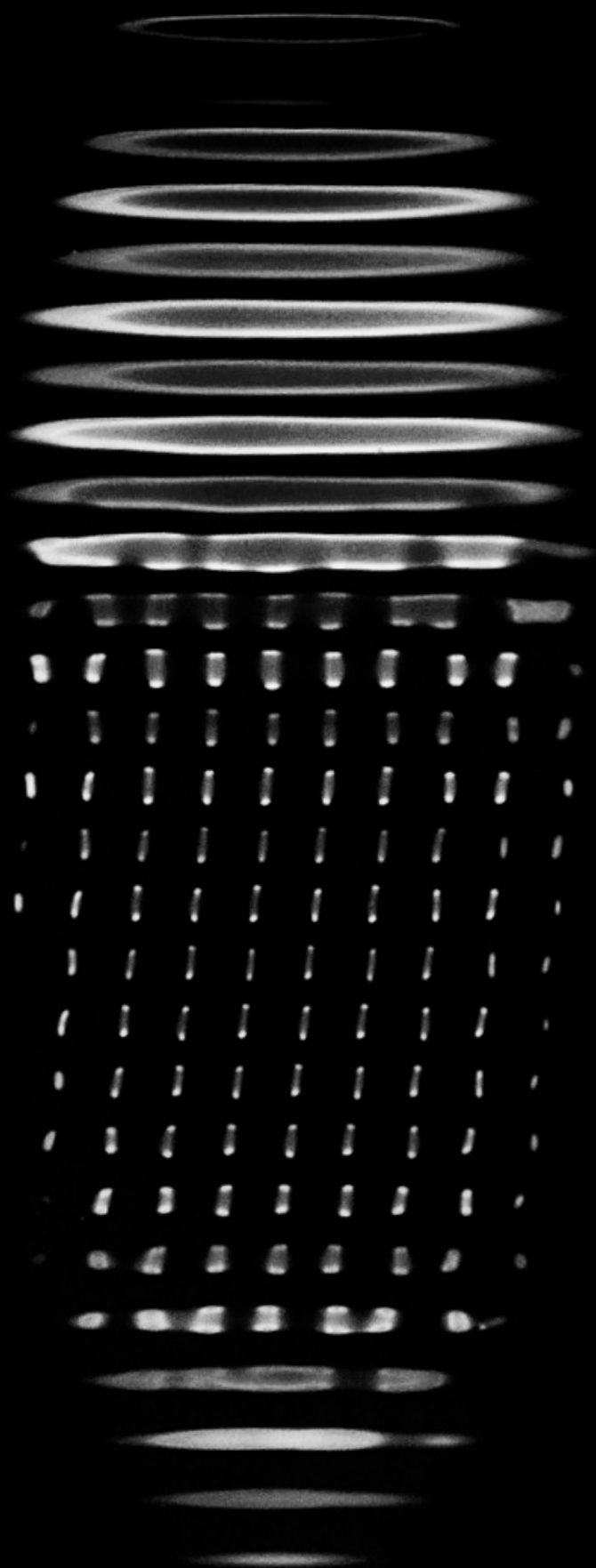


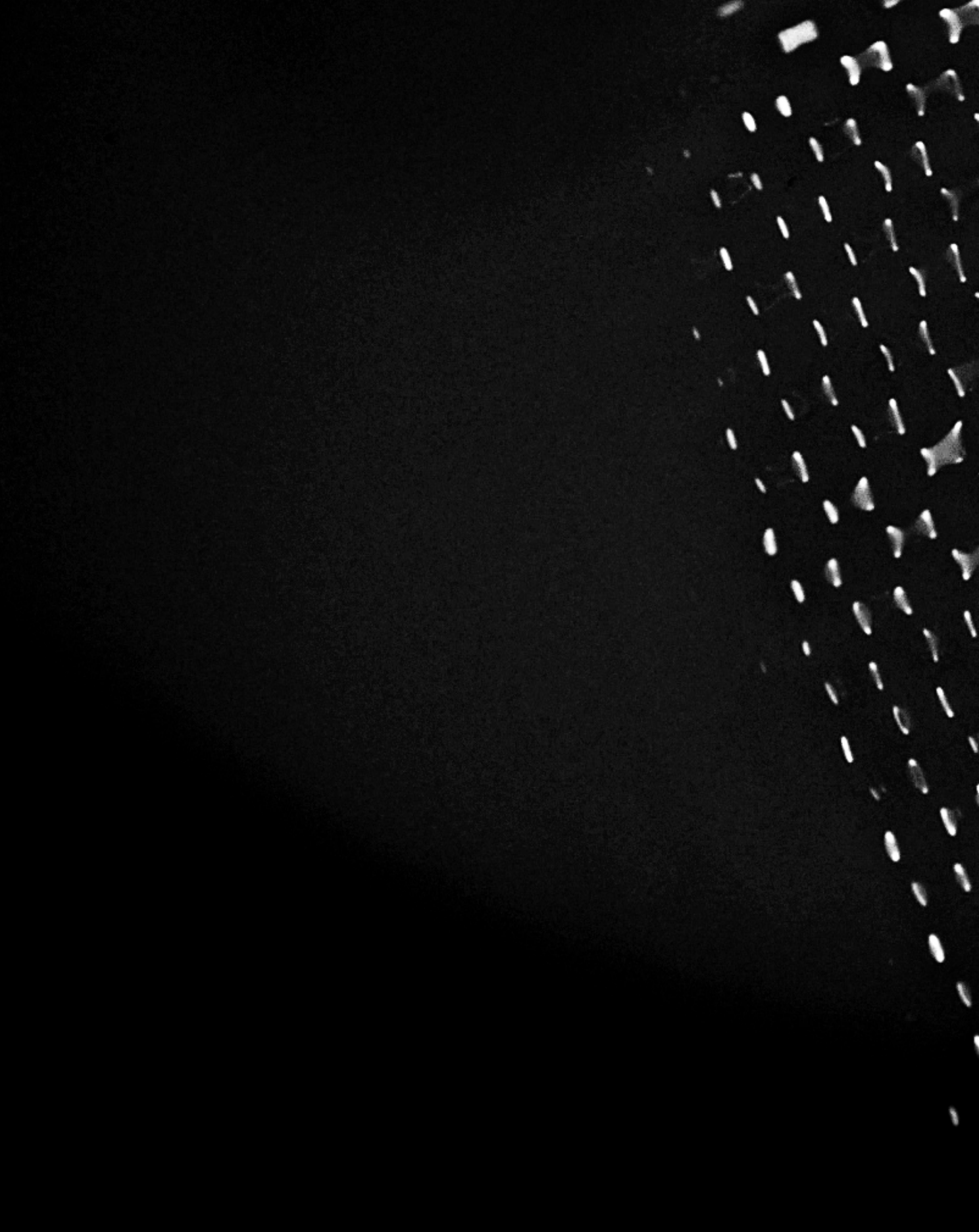


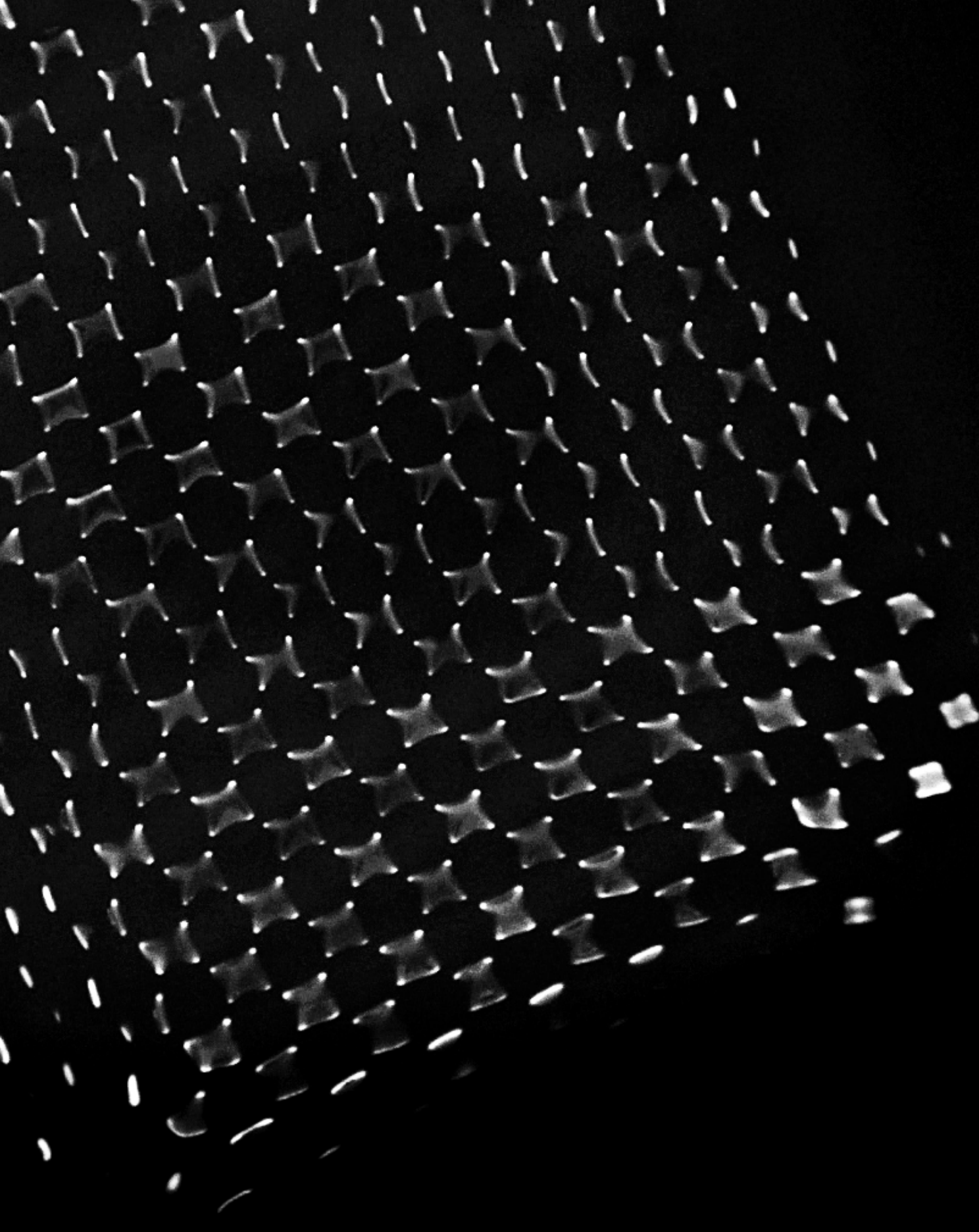


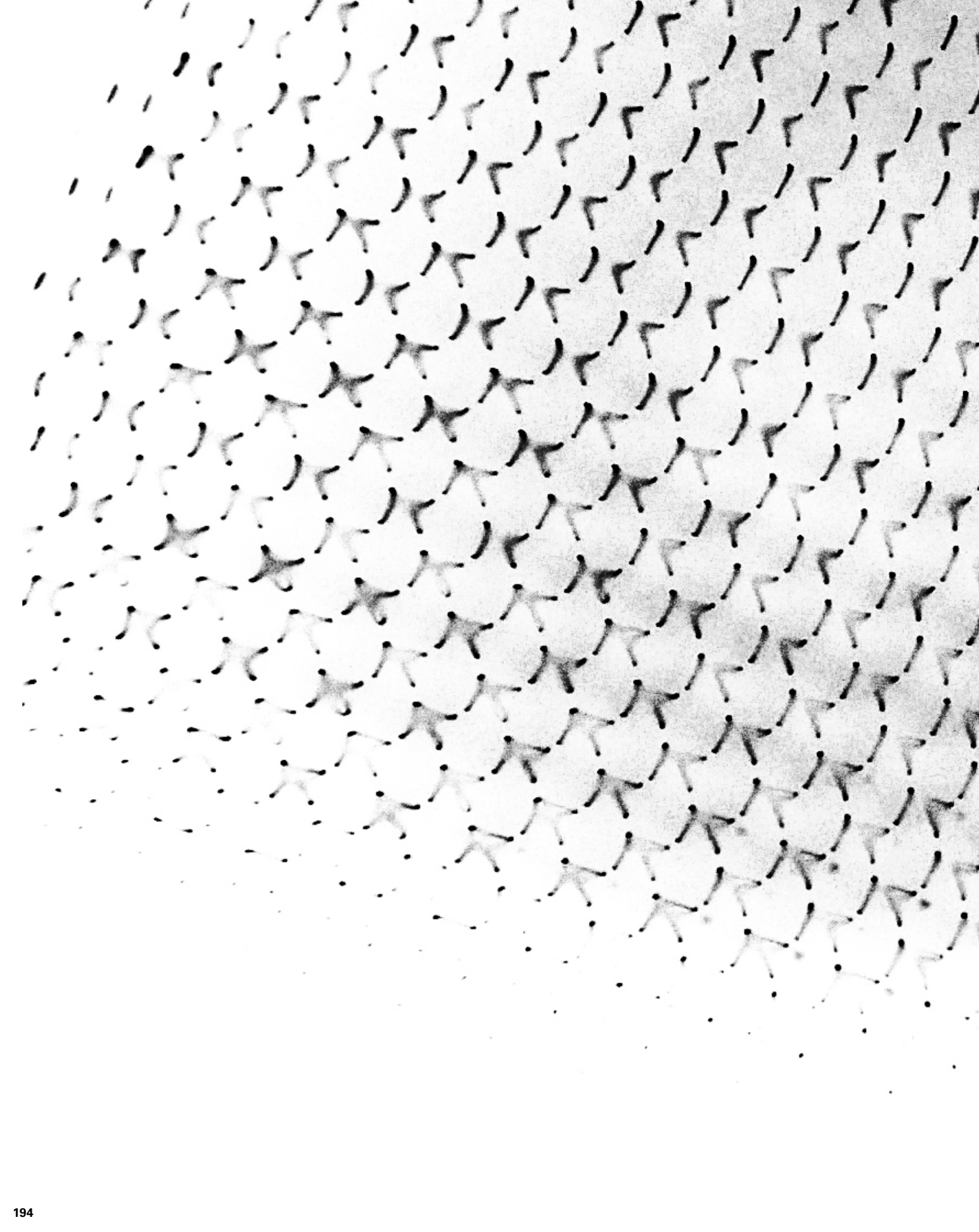


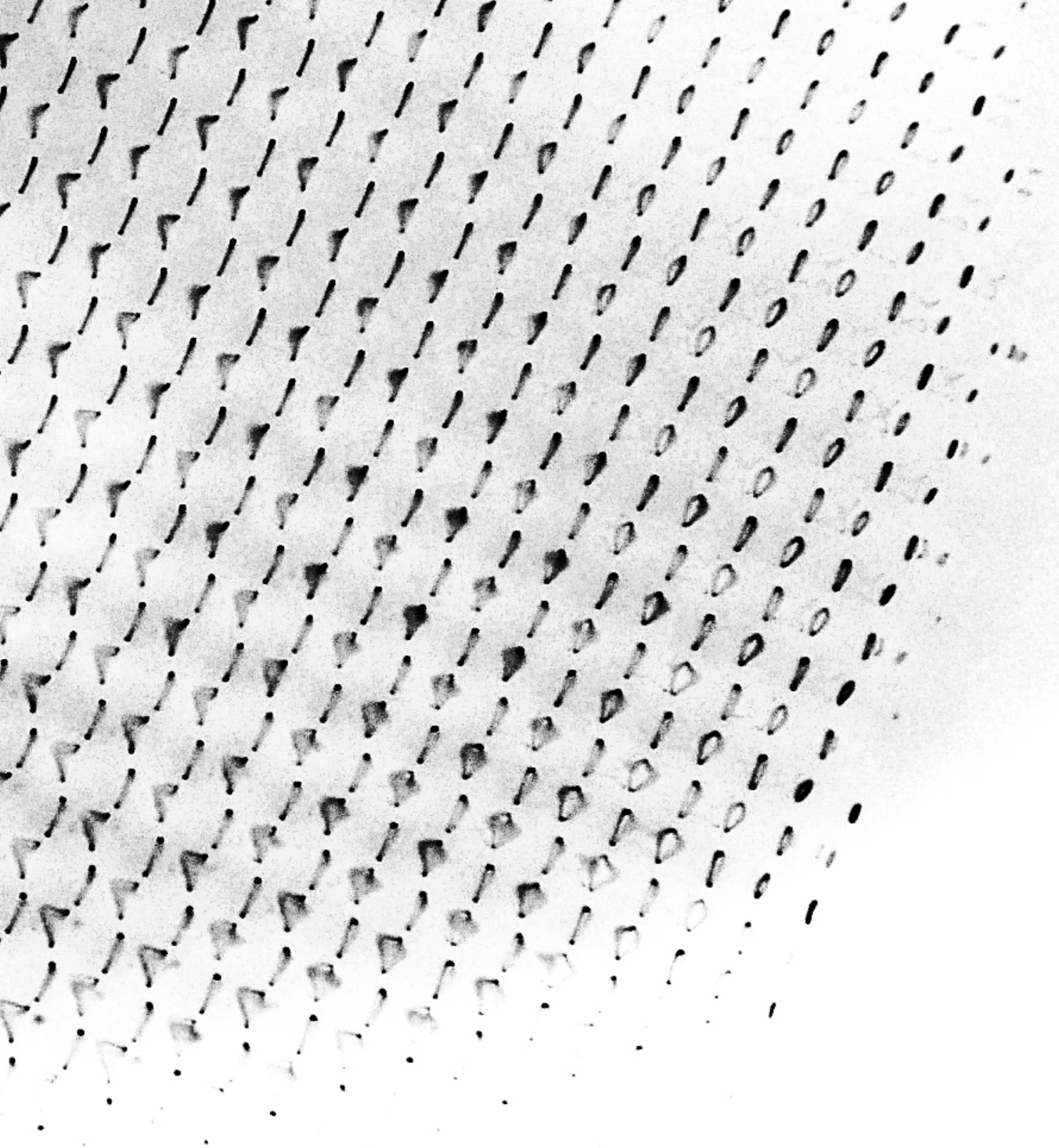




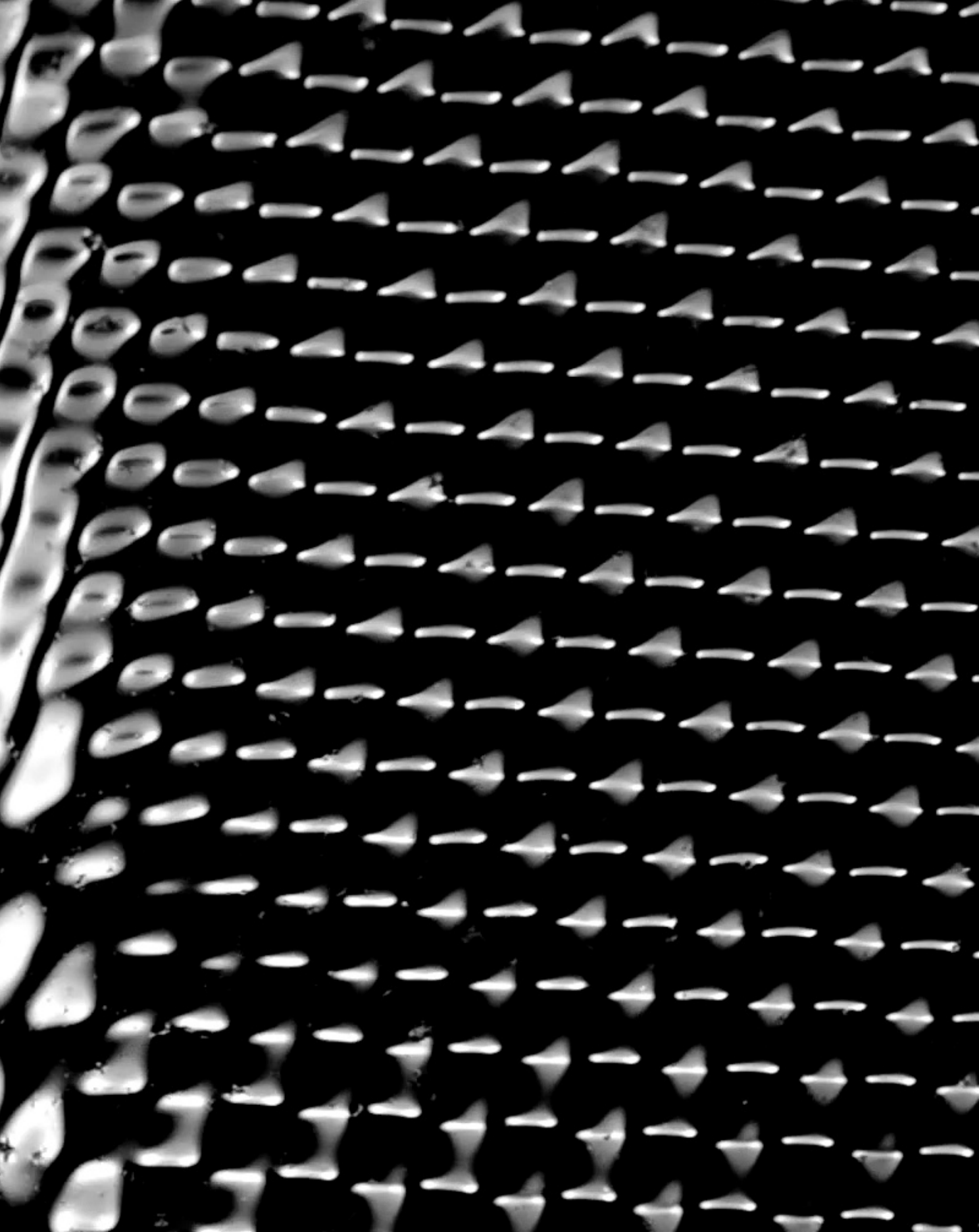


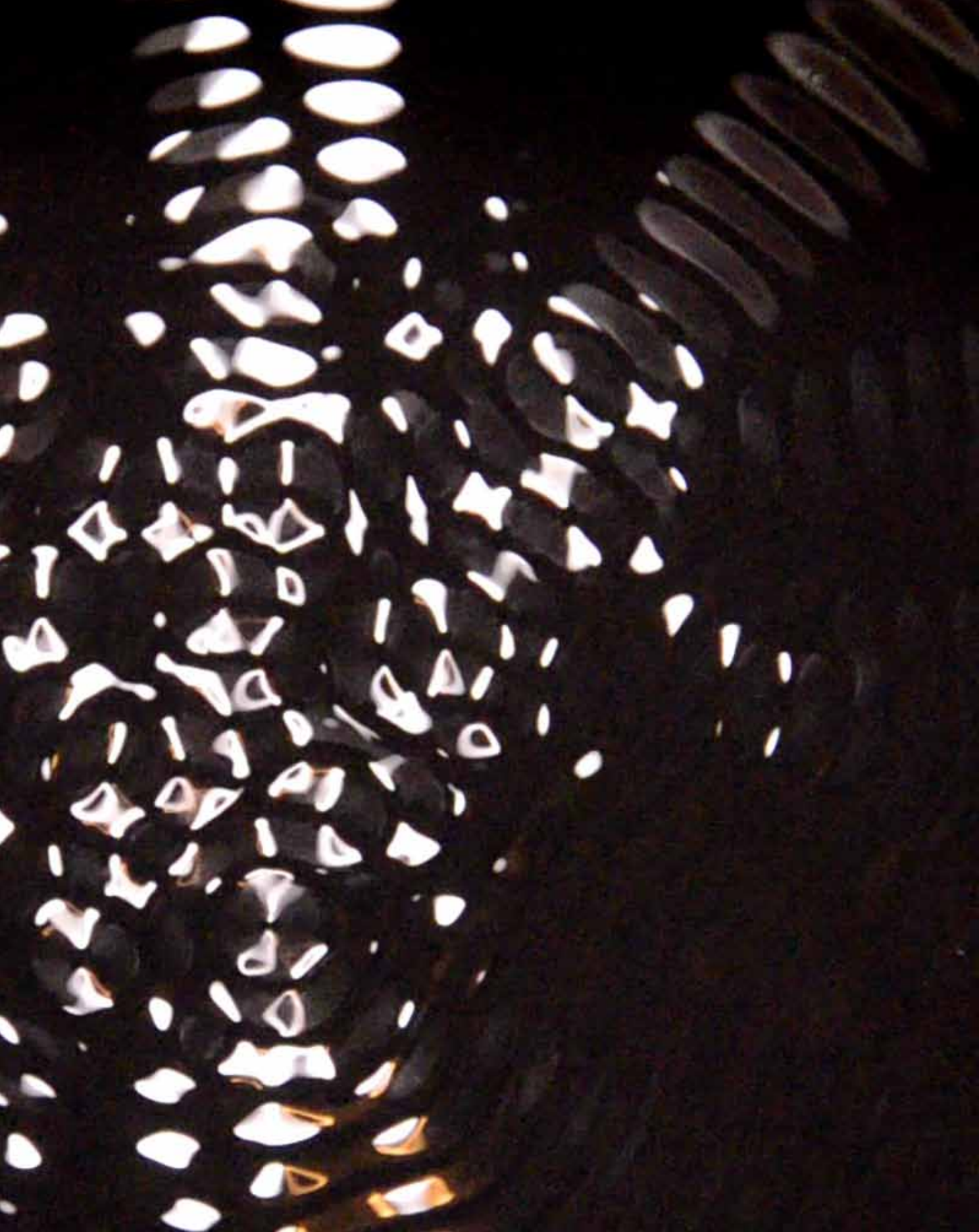


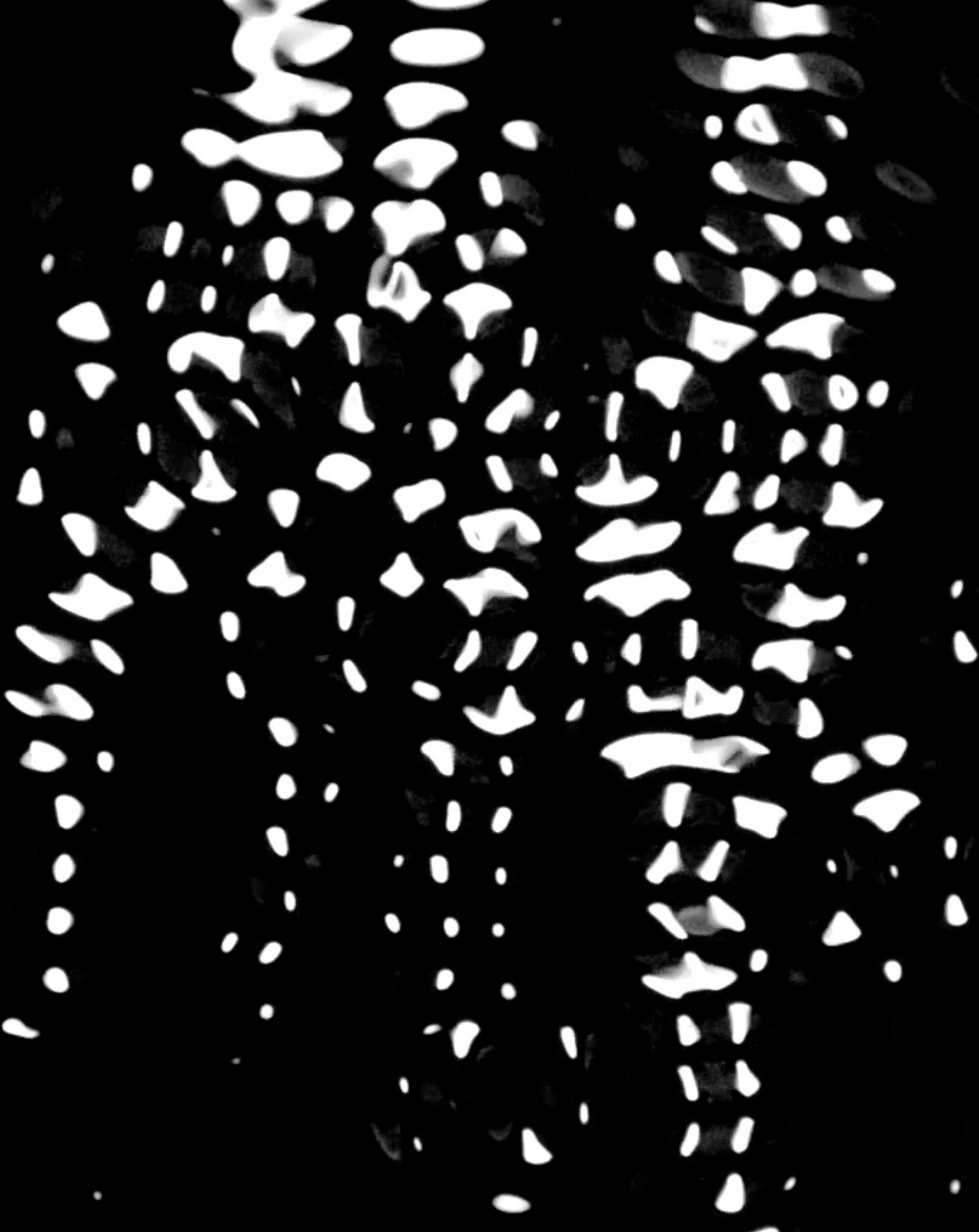




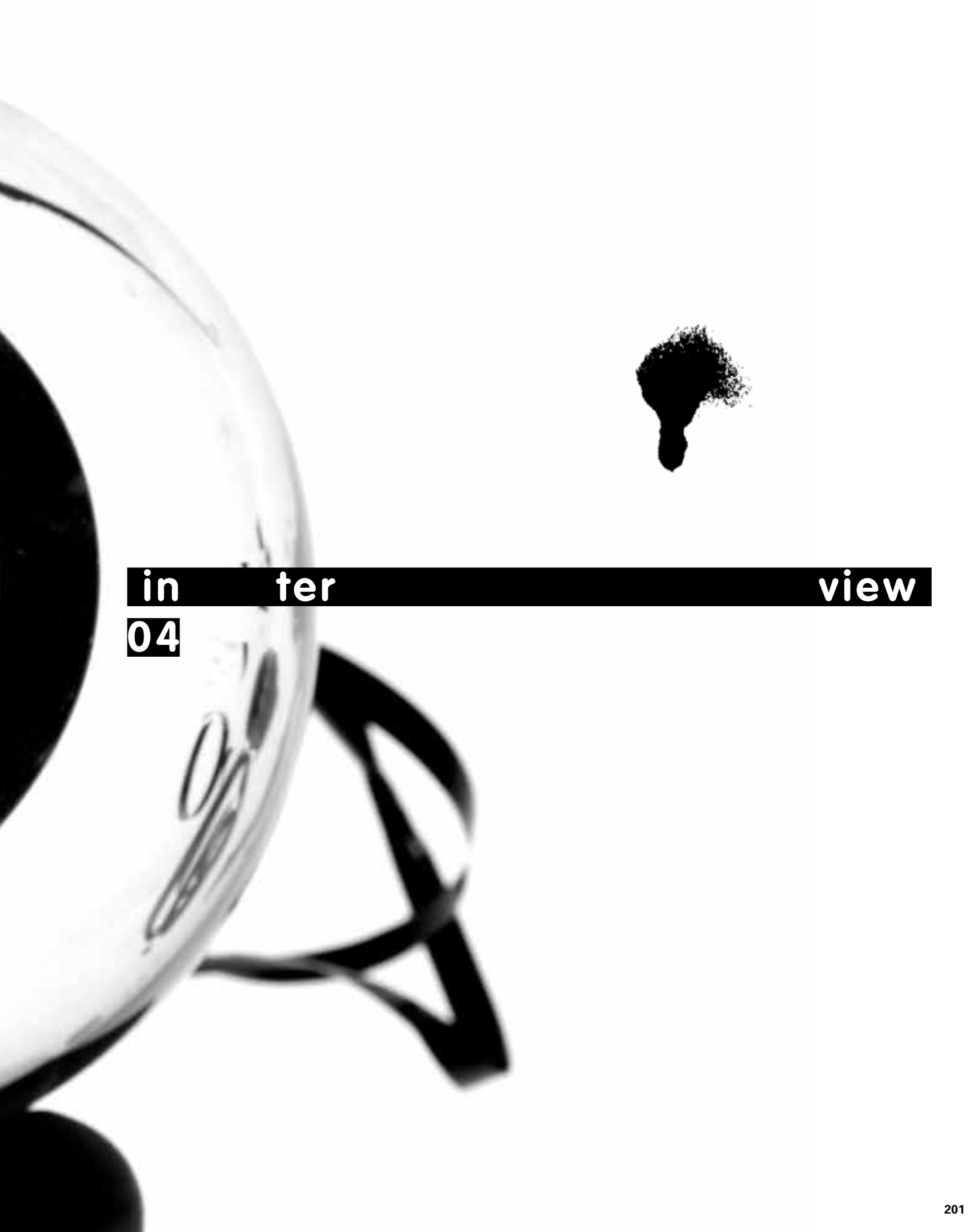












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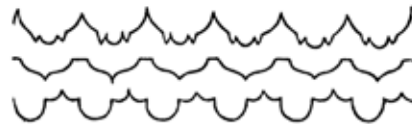
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I first met Rusty Hodge in 1998, the pre dot-com days in the SOMA district of San Francisco; they still called it “Multimedia Gulch” back then. At the time, I was just beginning my career at a brand new cable network called ZDTV, a spinoff of print publishing giant Ziff Davis. Part of my job as a production assistant was to digitize programs which had broadcast that day on-air and upload them to the internet, a fairly new idea for the time. Rusty was in charge of all streaming media for the channel; it quickly became clear to me that we had a lot in common, as he was not-so-secretly a music aficionado much like myself. We bonded, but soon lost touch for many years after he left; we both ultimately went on to other things; most notably, Rusty started a now fairly well known internet radio station, SomaFM, and ultimately was a seminal force in carving out a viable niche for internet broadcasters who were being unfairly harassed by industry heavyweights. Rusty is kind enough to play some of my tracks on the Drone Zone and Groove Salad stations.



Where did the idea of SOMA FM come from?

Ever since I was a little kid and my parents took me to Disneyland and the Disneyland hotel, and I saw there was a local radio station KEZY and the broadcast studios was at the Disneyland Hotel, it covered most of southern Ca. it was a 5000 watt radio station, but it was something I had listened to ever since I was a little kid, probably because it was the strongest one on the dial that wasn't talk radio, and I saw it was so cool what they're doing, playing all this music, all these people, look at all this equipment they have, that's cool, so I started doing a little bit of it, I had a tape recorder when I was really young and started doing like bad radio shows.

So you and me are identical in that sense, the tape recorder was my favorite thing to play with from the

time I was 4 or 5, my dad used to have these tape recorders that he used to record meetings with, he had the first walkman, the business walkman, it had a leather case and it was a brick, it was huge, but it had really nice stereo microphones; and then he'd have these little microphones that plugged in, stereo mics. He had a drawer full of these different mics, and I would inherit his older ones, and I used to make up radio shows with my sister, I used to secretly record people without them knowing it, and play it back later and embarrass them; it was my favorite thing to do.

Elementary and Jr. High school, and then I guess in high school, I started doing a little bit of DJing; it was 1977, for dances in high school, and around 77 or 78 my dad's company was working with some tech company. He gets a very early cordless telephone; he was like, look at this company. they want us to computerize this for



them. Here, you can play with it, and I play with it. I'm listening to it, I'm like, I don't remember how I figured this out, but somehow I figured out it transmitted on 1640 on the AM dial, it had like 49 mhz. and 1640 for the base station. I'm like, that's kind of cool, you can get it on the AM radio band. So I remember hooking up the phone jack of it to the output of my stereo, and playing music over it, and I can listen to this on the radio, and I went walking around the block and that's a pretty impressive distance, it goes over a block or so. So I started doing these little pirate radio broadcasts, every afternoon and evening on that, I'd record them as well, so when I couldn't do them on my own, I might play back 2 or 3 hours worth of taped ones.

Did you have other people listening?

I think so because I remember one time thinking, you need to know if people are listening to you, and saying 'even if you're too shy to call up and talk to us, just call the number, ring once and hang up,' and 5 seconds later someone called and hung up. So I was like, that's awesome, someone's listening.

Later I was looking at getting wireless FM microphones and hooking them up, I remember hooking one of them up on the roof to a big high gain FM antenna; it could go about a block or so, doing wireless. Then I realized that it was kind of frustrating 'cause it's a lot of work but not a lot of audience, and I'd also been playing around with phone things. I'd met this guy around dial-a-joke, and then he started doing this thing, they called it the comment line, where it's basically 2 lines, one was an answering machine where people would leave messages or comments about things, and then he'd

go and edit those together, and put them on a big tape loop and you'd dial into this other line and you'd hear people spliced together. I remember thinking, that's cool, I bet I could do that. So I started doing it, and it took off; this guy was a big radio and telephone tech nerd, and I was more like, caring about the content side of things, so I was trying to get higher production values, and you know, I started to get a following. That was my senior year in high school and I was doing that almost like full-time, I'd do 5 or 6 shows a week.

Do you have any of these recorded?

I have a couple floating around, unfortunately my mother decided to throw away a bunch of my old cassettes when she was cleaning house.

Sounds familiar.

But the high school I was at, it was a small private high school and they just hired this PR Person to help draw new students to the school and she was really good at doing press releases. She heard I was doing this, and sent out a press release about it. So I ended up getting coverage in the Orange County Register and the LA Times, and a few others,

and they all wrote articles about it, which shot the listenership up even more. Then I went off to college and started getting a little distracted, and wasn't doing it quite as frequently, but our college had a radio station that was off the air and I put together this whole package about how I should be able

to take over the radio station and put all the articles in there from the LA times. There was this other guy who was the hot man in the communications department. He comes to me and he's like, 'we saw your application, this is pretty impressive, all



this stuff you're doing, you know our radio station is completely wrecked right now'. It turns out that he had been working on getting a grant or some sort of thing, getting some money to basically build a whole new radio station from scratch, and why don't you work on that with me, you can like design it, put all the stuff together and I'll do the business deal side of it... so he handled the business side and I was left to design this thing. Here we have a place we can put it, what kind of equipment will we need, they'd just done a deal with the cable provider who just had come in to the city of Orange where Chapman University was, and they were giving him a cable tv channel and a cable radio channel, cable FM which turned out to be like, you had like 5 people listen to that but still it was kind of cool. Where we found our biggest amount of listeners, we got our radio station behind all the

character generator channels, which turned out to be awesome, and then it spawned our tagline, *radio worth watching*, because nobody had cable FM hookups back then but everybody was looking at the calendar, and they'd like our music so they'd leave it on the TV.

So then I got up into the commercial TV and radio world, and realized this really sucks, and I sort of retreated from that and started getting more involved with computers. My dad's a computer guy, and bulletin boards were just springing up and I got involved with that, but I always loved radio. So when the internet started taking off, i realized I knew tons of stuff about this internet thing, now I can get an edge to work with radio and tv stations getting stuff on the internet for them; I was doing work with KPIZ getting them on the internet, that's where I met Candy

Meyers. She went over to ZDTV, she brought me in over there. We had just done a little bit of Real Audio stuff at KPIX, so it is kind of fun for special events and things. Whenever there'd be big live news events, I'd rush over there and set up the Real Audio server streaming whatever was coming off the satellite; things we had permission to use, they didn't want to put full time on the air got a moderate mount of traction.

So I'm thinking, one of these days when this gets better, it'll be awesome. With ZDTV, one of the deals we had was with Real Audio networks, and they had 50,000 simultaneous streams of G2 audio, which sounded like bad FM, it was like 10 kHz. of bandwidth. It was OK, it was tolerable; actually you could listen to this. Not the greatest, but you can listen to it, it's not like listening to AM radio through a telephone, which is what real audio was like. I was like, wow that's cool, but then they're taking forever to do all this stuff we're supposed to be streaming, we contracted, the contract started say jan 1, and we were like 6 months away for getting any video content or live content, cause everything had been slowed down and wasn't launching as fast as they'd hoped it would.

This was in '97 I guess, ... well how about we do some stuff and stress test these servers, and put some generic content on it and try to get my friends to tune into it, and Pam Pfiffner says, it sounds good; meanwhile I'm collecting all this electronic music, and so I put together this winamp playlist of just a bunch of my favorite electronic music that I usually listen to in the background, and I'm encoding this with the real encoder, streaming it, and I'm like wow this sounds decent, and my friends are like, listening to it, tuning in, and I couldn't do that for too long, I did it for a month at the most, but that was sort of the first taste, and then we got real busy

doing video and tv stuff and I didn't give it another thought. So then I leave ZDTV and go off and do my own thing for a bit, and then a friend of mine starts this company that's doing these real time information searches, 'come and do our operational stuff, we're all friends we're all gonna get really rich'.

I'm like OK fine whatever, sounds like it'll be like a fun thing to do, and he's like 'we're going to buy lots of equipment and lots of stuff and you can set it all up', I'm like 'cool I love to buy things', and so we're doing our own stuff. We set up all this equipment, developers are behind schedule deploying stuff, so I said, 'oh I'll set up a shoutcast streaming thing', because shout cast had just come out, and this works really well. Then suddenly everybody at the office like 15 people out of 30 that were tuning in to this stream I was putting together, again it was just Win Amp playing the stream, and I'm like, well that's kind of cool, let's try to do a little more, and we'd



just signed a deal with some ISP to get like 10 megabits of bandwidth and we're not using any of it, so I set up a streaming server on it, part of my justification is like, this is my way of testing this stuff, and as soon as the audio goes on, there's a network problem. It was good because when it did go down we did know it was a network problem and we'd fix it; so more and more people started tuning in to it. So I'm thinking, wow, this could be really serious, so I start looking around, but win amp is so crappy, it doesn't segway stuff, it's really hard to schedule things. I start looking around and this friend of mine who's the phone phreak guy who did the comment line early on that I've known forever, he says like, 'oh I've got some really cool software I've been using, it's only 49 dollars it's called Onyx DJ.' I'm like, really? 'Yeah, it sounds

really good you should check it out it has a really simple audio processor with gain control so your levels are consistent', I'm like really? So I like buy it, I'm like, this is not bad.

So it's like an MP3 DJ thing

This is a much newer version of it, you can program it, you can build all these scheduling rules, the thing that was really awesome about it was the AGC, (automatic gain control) you could set it really slow so if you had a quiet song and a loud song, people wouldn't have to be messing with their volume all the time. The audio levels were all over the place.

So it's actually like a compressor/limiter?

Yeah, AGC and a compressor limiter,



the AGC is real slow, and the way I have it set up, the scope, it's only like 6 DB of gain riding. And the way you can program it, Actually the hard drive just crashed on this and I just rebuilt it, I have no music on it, but I have 4 test files, I'll give you an example of what you can do on it. This version we use is like 500 bucks. This is what I'd call third world professional broadcast software, there are certain limitations but there are certain things it does really well.

This sets the cue point at this part of the waveform, this is when it's gonna cue the next thing, this red part here is where it's actually decided that's some fade it's muting the track actually ends right where this yellow does, it will guess these things for you and you can go trim these things up for yourself, it does really awesome segways, it does it on

in the playlist, and then those get loaded up in this system, we have to convert the files into this thing called an OX file which is basically an MP3 with the additional info from the editor and some extra metadata on it, theoretciaiilly they put all that stuff into an ID3V2 tag, but this predates ID3V2 so they're kind of stuck with the IC format. There's a lot of categorization that happens which i usually do in iTunes, this is a groovesalad song, but this is a song you don't want to hear all too often, and this is more uptempo, this is more downtempo, this one has vocals, this one's instrumental, so I categorize, I go to great lengths to categorize everything. I built these templates, play 2 instrumental songs, 1 vocal, the 1 instrumental. Do 3 groups of that, and then throw in the spice track, and also there's things like, songs have weights on them,

"the original LP was an artifact, it was something you had to treat carefully, it was easy to destroy, you had to respect it." - rusty hodge

the leave-in as well, if you have a song that starts really quiet and you want to do much more tighter cross-fade between the two, you just move the intro reference point over here, and set it there, and so because of that you can get really great sounding segways. This is an example of the scripting language where you build up your things, like don't play things from this cat, and nothing is played an x number of songs, since this artist and this song hasn't been played in this period of time. Over the years we've generated some really complicated scripts.

Is that where you start with your playlists? or are your playlists generated more organically?

I use iTunes for generating playlists. I've got all this music in iTunes, I'm listening to it, I'm finding stuff, so use iTunes to sort out what are the tracks I want to include

like how often or how less often do you want to have them, and then this also randomizes things a little tiny bit as well; so depending on for example the spice tracks are not really randomized, because there's not that many of them, they play very infrequently so they're pretty much rotated through just whichever what was the one we played the longest time ago, that'll be the next one.

What's a spice track?

It's a track that is interesting to hear, but you don't want to hear it all the time. If you're typical listener to SomaFM a spice track on most of our channels will be something you might hear once every few months to once a year depending on the channel, how big it's playlist is, so they're the songs you want to hear but if you hear them a couple times your'e like, so sick of it, Stairway to Heaven would be a spice track for an AOR

station; everybody knows this and you have to play it every now and then.

Is that an industry term? spice track? I've never heard of that

I've worked at some radio stations where they've referred to it that way and I've heard some other people, I didn't coin the term, I don't know.

So you have to be very careful with it in other words.

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best tracks, but it still kind of interests, everyone knows it, there's certain Beatles tracks that fall into this category, they were never hits, they were never really popular, but everybody knows that song, so you play that from time to time.

How you use the spice depends on the type of program you're doing, like the lounge channel, which is a novelty channel, with novelty music, the spice tracks on there will be the ones that are so crazy and out there, like some of the sha sha perrie stuff, (imitates it)

So, it's hard to listen to.

Yeah, they're fun to hear 2 minutes of that like once a day, once every couple days, but you never do a set of these, you never play a couple of them in an hour, or people will just run screaming. The first couple times was awesome but now I'm gnashing my teeth it's so bad.

So that's interesting, it's all done more or less algorithmically but you have a very elaborate set of tags to start with.

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for people, and people are talking about things. We did a thing during the lunar eclipse, across most of our channels we played big sets of songs that were about the moon. And even if they just had the moon in the title, like you know, it was an instrumental track called like The Moon is Out, it's just so many people looking at their eclipse, and they see that and a lot of times people look at the Twitter feed and someone will say something like 'oh I love groove salad, especially this song that I never hear anymore', and I'll go on there and schedule it to play right away. And then Elise who does Indie

Pop Rocks, she runs the algorithmn to set things up and then she goes and spends a lot of time hand tuning the next 48 hours; she does like 2 or 3 day blocks, and she basically uses the algorithms to fill in all the recurring stuff, the older stuff, not the new stuff, and then she goes and manually schedules all the new stuff to play, and then she's got a lot of these artists who do the station IDs, "Hi this is ____ you're listening to Indie Pop Rocks on SomaFM", she'll put those together with the artist's song that she's gonna play. So she'll do them more by hand and then I'll continue to do more algorithmic programming, and the by-hand stuff is based on feedback, but she doesn't pay a lot of attention to feedback that people give her; well, she does but not in real-time. She doesn't read her email for like 3 days, and then she'll go through and see what the feedback is.

You must get a lot of email.

We get a lot of spam. Twitter and Facebook have been actually much better for getting feedback from people than email.

The world seems to be going in that direction.

It's funny, you get some people that write in, 'oh I'd love to hear this song by the way, please don't add this email, it's my work address so please don't put it on your mailing list please don't reply to me cause I'm not supposed to be using it for personal reasons but then they can do Facebook and twitter.

We're gonna do a rev of our iPhone app and one of the things will be to send a message to a DJ and it'll actually end up in our email.



So, I'm combining my love for music and audio with my love for graphic design, so the frame of my thesis is really around the lost physicality of music, and so I'm using the LP record as sort of a vehicle for this nostalgia, but I'm interested in pushing forward the notion that this old media could continue to evolve and progress forward, beyond where we've left it sticking in the mud, or in the tar pit, when we embraced the MP3. Academically a lot of what I'm doing is sort of critiquing the current state of affairs in terms of how people listen to music and how it's not valued in the same way in the culture as a result of it's dematerialization. I think I'm really interested in what you're doing because you're embracing the digital and internet technology that allows everybody to have immediate access to these things all the time but in a way you're a curator of this experience that is sort of bringing us back to the time when radio was very warm and human, and culture was far less fragmented.

Right.

And I feel like that's kind of what we've lost.

Right.

In this immersive data-bit universe, I can basically plug in and have anything at any given time and there's no scarcity there's no hunting anything down, there's no art of discovery, or human connection there. So I'm really interested in the fact that you exist in this sort of in-between world where you're part of the digital landscape, but you're really not even trying to make a profit with what you're doing. You're really trying to keep it community based and exist in a way that's not trying to grow and take over the world.

I want to grow slowly. I mean, it's funny, we have 20 channels and 2 christmas channels and some other

seasonal stuff. 5 years ago we had 10 channels, so we're growing but it's a natural, more sustainable growth.

Are you a non-profit?

No.

But you're sort of run like a non-profit.

Yeah. Actually you know, part of that's because there are so many accounting rules that go along with being a non-profit, and the only benefit it would give to our donors is that you can do a tax write off if they itemize over a certain level; so really what it keeps us from getting is big corporate donations and grants and things like that, that's really the only thing it keeps us from getting.

I'm assuming you wouldn't be likely to get those types of things anyway because you're sort of in competition with a lot of the more commercial corporations.

Yeah ... I'm sure we could try to go after the kinds of people, the NPR, the KQEDs, go after, and if we had someone working for us who's full job is to drum that up, and to me it's basically the more subtle, less annoying form of advertising.

It's kind of the same really.

With just listener support, if a listener is pissed off, fine, here's your 20 dollar donation back, I refund it to them, and I've done this a couple times where I've gotten someone, 'I'm a donor, I don't like the fact that you're doing this', well, I'll refund your donation, sorry we're going to keep doing it, um, I'm not being an asshole.

What do people get mad about?

Oh, every now and then certain people feel very entitled to like, having us never play certain songs, like "I find



this song offensive", you know.

Wow.

The funniest thing, like, the most recent example of it, there's a Fila Brazillia song I play called 'The Light of Jesus'.

Oh yeah.

You've heard it, right? With all these samples of a crazy televangelist going off, and this person is all, 'as an atheist I'm offended by this', I'm like, really? Have you listened to the lyrics of this song?

Yeah, they're in your camp. <laughs>
Wow. Some people just don't get humor.

And um, 'Yeah I know but still the average person will think it's promoting Jesus'... I'm like, ok fine whatever, 'I'm a donor, I don't think you should play it anymore.' I'm like, I'm going to continue to play

it and a lot of people like it and I think it's a great song, and bottom line is, we gained our audience by people trusting my judgement in music with a few exceptions, but now I understand how you feel so I'll refund your donation, and I hope you'll tune in from time to time... and one guy got really upset that I refunded his donation. In a positive way he was like, 'I wasn't trying to, no, I was just trying to give you some feedback, go ahead and play the song, in fact, I just donated a hundred dollars to you' like, double the donation I refunded...

Part of what I'm exploring is inventing kind of new formats that are more physical.

I think that the CD killed the physical format.

I totally agree because it sucks.

Well, I'm actually a fan of the audio quality of CDs and I know some people don't agree with that.

I think the packaging sucks more than the audio.

Well, the original LP was an artifact, it was something you had to treat carefully, it was easy to destroy, y o u had to respect it, it was beautiful, it had this wonderful packaging.

A smell.

Full of information, with the exception of a few crappy LPs that had no liner notes or anything like that, but the good stuff, maybe it wasn't a fold out but it had an inner sleeve with stuff printed on it, liner notes, a l l sorts of great stuff.

And you would sit there and you would experience the visual artifact while you had some

thing to do with your hands; I grew up this way, I grew up listening to Beatles records and looking at the art work while I had those giant headphones on.

Right! That was the thing you did while listening to music, you looked at the thing that went along with it. And the CD comes out and it's this thing that is touted as being indestructible, which it wasn't, I took it for granted that they were indestructible, I treated them like shit, and they all started failing, but most people thought they're indestructible, they're in this hard plastic case, you could throw them around, you could drop them, they would still play. You didn't have to take care of them, they were no longer this precious object.

You could leave them on the floor of your car and they would still play.

Oh yeah, no problem, you could pile them on top of each other, you may not want to slam the door on them or something; I remember I had a very early CD player in my car, and I remember having like 15 loose CDs like on my passenger seat and they'd fallen down in-between the hump in the seat, and that was the first time I realized you could mess up CDs because one started skipping where it'd rubbed up against a piece of metal, I was like OOOH, I got to be a little more careful with that... and then you just buff it out, and you're like YEAH WHO CARES they are indestructible... you lost respect for them, it was sort of like the difference between a piece of original art and a cheap poster of it, right? You might tack one up on the wall, the other one you're going to frame and take good care of and pay more attention to it, probably because it cost you more, or it took more effort, or you had to be more careful with it, so I think CDs sort of destroyed the whole artifact-ism of the associated materials that came with music.

Right. And also the playback itself was electric, physical, tapes were magnetic, so you're dealing with actual forces of nature in the playback that your humanity can interface with in ways that we may trivialize but I think actually is a component to our connectiveness with the media in that, you know, when you scratch a record you have a record that skips in a certain place or those pops and clicks are like, they've become over time, they adopt a history that's unique, it's my version of Physical Graffiti, and it's different from yours.

What's the thing we have now, people selling plugins, those fake vinyl plugins?

We have the same things in graphic design and photography now too. Instamatic, it's like oh look your iphone can do that. The Hipstamatic, a crappy old camera, and now we think clean is weird, you know? And it took people awhile to figure that out. I think people were really enamored with the cleanliness, I remember when CDs first came out I was really impressed with how clean they were, and then it started to kind of hurt my ears after awhile, and I remember cause I grew up with tapes, records weren't even really a big deal they were sort of a big deal when I was younger, but when I was a teenager, I was into cassettes, I mean they're shitty but there's a warmth that it has, I remember when I got into 4 track and 8 track recording, how much information you could jam on to a cassette, even though it was lo-fi in terms of the frequency range, they didn't have a lot of super high end and a lot of bass, it still had a warmth and a saturation that didn't exist in any form of digital recording, and I remember when I first got into multi-tracking on my Mac, when that became possible, in like the late 90s, when you could record on a sound card and do multi-tracking,

I remember being really bummed at how weird it sounded and how kind of sterile it sounded, what was missing was that natural distortion, that harmonic distortion that jamming signal onto tape would give you if you over-saturated it.

Well see what's interesting about some of those, I don't think those are necessarily inherent flaws in digital, I think they're ... digital is still very young, the way we're dealing with a lot of

those
analog
tech-
nolo-
gies,

GOOD

there's like 50 years of tech behind them, so they didn't have to worry about certain kinds of circuitry with analog recording tape, because it's like, oh well you don't need to

worry about like doing good limiting on a signal because it'll saturate the tape, and it happens to sound good, so same with vacuum tubes, you don't care as much about over-driving it, because when they distort, they sound nice as opposed to a more traditional power transistor which sounds pretty nasty when it distorts, so then once you start abusing those kinds of power transistors, it's all about how to minimize distortion, but when you're using tubes, if you look at the specs of super high end audiophile tube equipment, it's like .1 percent total harmonic distortion. That's kind of high, a transistor is .002 percent. But once that thing starts distorting the distortion is

so much nastier sounding, even less of it, the vacuum tube distortion is pleasing to our ears, the transistor distortion is harsh, it's like something that does not play nicely with the way our brain listens to things, and I think we used a lot of those kind of technologies thinking like oh well, you know, we're just gonna use the same kind of circuitry that we put stuff on tape with to digitize things, and it'll be fine, and they didn't realize that no, because

you forgot that that whole tape thing is part of the recording process, the actual head going to the tape, if you're going to digital, you don't have that extra non-linear step in there that you have to deal with that's in the rest of your analog circuitry before it hits the digital,

and people weren't doing that except a few crazy people were making really super high end analog to digital converters doing

dddj

things like that, and their stuff was sounding pretty amazing.

Also, you don't have the bit depth and the sample rate like now, we have that and it's better then it was but back then when I first started doing this it was 16 bit 44.1 and I was going into a digidesign audio media III card, and everything just sounded really tinny.

I'm still convinced that part of that stuff is like, the digital audio stuff was either done by computer guys who had no analog sense, or they're done by analog guys who had no digital sense, you know the jitter issues with the early CD players, the root of that thing is from,

they clocked their D to A converters from the actual motor that was driving the disk and they'd read the laser and it would have it's timing on there, that's the clock they drove the digital analog converter with, not a crystal clock. But with that, and that thing had all sorts of mechanical and motor noise going on, and I remember reading stuff about jitter, going 'this does not make sense at all, why would anybody do something like this?' and I look at the schematic and the clock source is coming off the pickup off the optical disk? There's no buffer in here? They really did it that way? And then you start looking at things and you realize yeah, it's because they were analog guys building this stuff they didn't even think about things like having a crystal based clock and buffering stuff, right? And you know some of that stuff was just because I know so many early digital was nasty, but some of the early digital stuff was really good though, I've listened to some ... there was some stuff that um, guess it was Donald Fagan, Steely Dan, Night Flight was an all digital recording, that was a very clean very nice sounding recording, they generated all their warmth in the studio before they laid it down to digital, they knew they had to do that, they weren't relying on, it's sort of like, sometimes I think like the analog tape let...

It let people be lazy.

Do you know John Vanderslice or know of him? He runs Tiny Telephone studio. He talks about trashy Hi-Fi, he's like, what we do is we buy this really super high end classic great analog equipment, and then we kind of randomly set things on it, we don't fine tune it, you don't have to try to get good sounds out of them, we just put the vocal through the Levin 70 limiter and it just no matter how you set it, it sounds pretty good, you know some ways it might sound a little better, but it still sounds way better then not having it in there,

so that's what we do, we have a bunch of this really cool vintage stuff and we don't even need to know how to use it, you use this thing and it does stuff, that's I think what happens, so much of this old analog gear was very forgiving, and the people who made it kind of I know at least in the Broadcast equipment things were designed to be overdriven, they weren't supposed to start distorting till you're at like +18 DB, and they were supposed to have at least 65 DB of signal to noise ratio from the zero point, so you know really they had like 85 DB of signal noise ratio from their low end to where they did distort, but broadcast guys would have their stuff just pegged the whole time, and they weren't getting any distortion out of it, the chains were built that way, and then people switch over to cheaper equipment, and as soon as you're over like +6 DB you're getting all sorts of distortion and then nobody knew, nobody got it forever with digital that zero is the top end, the digital guys blew that, they should have set it at +10, but instead they set it at 0 DB.

There's no headroom.

Yeah they didn't set it up with any headroom. And the other reason some of the first CDs sounded so horrible is because they didn't actually digitize them from the master tapes, they did it from the EQed masters, which were the masters that were used to press the LPs, and they had the RIAA curve. Some of the CD players would tell you when the CDs were being played back with that curve applied to it, they were basically taking the digitized signal off of it and then running an RIAA form of curve against it, and the chips, whatever the electronics they were using for that, nobody gave a shit about that, and those all sounded horrible, not like anyone would put it in any decent sounding audio equipment, we got this 15 cent part that has that as an option, ok we'll use that, and if you had a record player playing it through that

you'd say, eeew, this preamp sounds like shit, and so I have some old CDs that were recorded that way and I had this old CD player that would tell you if it was playing something back that used that preamp, this interesting contrast with the new CDs that were remastered from the original tapes, and these old ones, that was a huge world of difference between the two, that was amazing,

So what's your opinion on MP3 quality?

I think it sounds pretty good.

Really?

at 320k.

What if you're in a club that has decent sound?

The only ones that sound bad are the low bit rate ones or the ones that

I don't know, I'm not so negative on MP3s, at high bit rates, but I mean, at 320k you're not saving a lot of space, might as well use a wav file. But I've a/b tested on some systems. I can definitely hear stuff on low bit rated MP3s, when we rolled out our 80s channel on Soma FM, even though we were using good audio processing on stuff on it, it was like, shit this sounds horrible at 128k, a lot of electronic music doesn't sound so bad at 128k but certain music sounds just nasty and the 80s stuff was sounding just horrible so I added 192k stream and I was like, that sounds pretty good, about as good as a 128k stream of our electronic stuff, good enough for radio... a lot of the problem is that a lot of the bands are sending out 128k mp3s, and they're not even paying attention to the quality.

Do people ever send you tapes? Or vinyl?



We get vinyl from time to time

What about lathe cut vinyl?

Like test pressing sort of things?
You know what sounded like shit? Picture disks.

You mean those floppy ones that came in the magazines?

No, the ones that were like regular 12" vinyl but with pictures on them. Because they were basically like a printed piece of plastic with one of those avetone sound sheets glued on top of it, those little things that came on the back of cereal, that's what a sound sheet is, flexi-disk, the company is called evatone.

And was that part like transparent?

Yes, they made a clear one, and they glued that on to the other disk, it wasn't exactly that but for all practical purposes that is what it was, it was another layer that they would press and glue on top, super thin.

That's kind of what I'm doing, but I'm using the vinyl, it's actually polyurethane, it's thick enough that it's, the grooves are, there's embossing, and then there's diamond cut, and I'm actually investing in a diamond cutter for the project so you can scratch on it.

A company called Presto made lathes for cutting records in the 60s and 70s, I was so close to getting one when I was in college, I found a guy who was selling one, it was everything but the turntable part of it.

There's a guy in Germany who makes a setup for the Technics that has the torque, the SP-10, and he has all the connections to the African diamond mafia.

They're really common at radio stations.

So do you digitize stuff?

When necessary. This is the legacy media rack. We have a turntable, cassettes, DAT player. There's a lot of interesting stuff floating around on tape. The problem I have with cassettes is, it's too easy to get a crinkle on it and then get dropouts on them which I really hated the way that sounded, but I have to tell you as far as longevity, cassettes have lasted a long time, I can take cassettes from the '70s and play them back with no problem.

From what I understand they are making a comeback too, with the younger kids, in the noise band scene, and they're all hand made.

This one guy did his christmas release on cassette, it's just a home grown thing, but he did about 25 of them, 30 of them, gave them away to all his friends at clubs and stuff. He's not a DJ, I guess he DJs from time to time, he's an artist, he does comics, he collects weird records, he's happy to play them at bars that let him play his records, he did our Pop Tron logo on Soma FM.

I get a lot of hits from Soma FM. Emails too from weird places, asking me where they can buy my stuff. You can download it, it's free. Not for long.

Put it on iTunes.

That's old stuff anyway, I want to make some new stuff. When I get time.

I got to tell you, how many musicians have done stuff that people like, and they're like, I don't care about that stuff anymore, and I'm like, but people want it. I forget the guy's name. There's like 4 tracks he sent, here's some stuff I did this summer, and then he had a kid, and then he stopped doing music for like 3 years.

HEY, that's exactly what happened to me!

<laughing>

He let his website expire, he's like, oh yeah my hard drive crashed, it turns out we had the only copy that he knew of, of his music.

Oh my god that's cool.

So I sent it all back to him and he uploaded it to archive.org and pointed people there for it, and a lot of people want it and like it.

So one of my ideas it's kind of a crazy idea but I have this plan to pitch to investors this concept of basically like blurb for records.

That could be interesting, that actually is a really good idea.

Thank you.

I would steal that idea if I had more free time.

You're too busy.

I think that's great, in fact if you do that and you get some VC money behind it and you want someone to be on your board of directors...

Well maybe you can help me get it in front of the right people.

So my plan is, my thesis is about making art and music and putting them together with really cool packaging, basically, on the one side.

Dude I think you'd have something there for bands if you did vinyl and cassettes.

That's the whole point, upload your tracks, upload your artwork, you can work with a producer or an artist, or not, you can do your own thing, and then basically we're responsible for putting the product out made to order.

Stuff you could add to that, is like have your stuff mastered by a profes-

sional mastering engineer.

And here's the other thing, is I'd be marketing to people who aren't necessarily musicians, but who have either audio of their kid goofing off, or you know, a lot of things that we did when we were growing up, I feel like just pure audio is kind of being subsumed by all of the video but I think just audio by itself is really important and so if I wanted to send my wife a valentine poem, and make it really special, so I record myself reading it and then I put it on a disk, you know?

Have you noticed how much content on YouTube is actually just audio content with a slide behind it?

Yes, a lot of it.

Yeah, that tells you something.

So, that's what I want to do, I want to bring the record back in a format that is basically for the YouTube generation, for people who want to make their own media that they can touch and feel and hang on a wall.

You've got to do cassettes too, that look like the old school cassettes, that have the clear ones with the white imprinting on them.

I mean, I love cassette, and I think the idea lends itself to expanding to that, but I think vinyl is probably the killer app

That'll get you going but I think you need to make that thing take off, it has to look like that. <picks up completely clear cassette tape>

OK YEAH YEAH YEAH, ok you know here's a funny thing about me, is I used to the first thing that I would do when I would get a see through cassette, I remember when these first thing came out it was a big deal if you saw something in the store that was on a see through cassette that was really special, right... and the first thing

I would do and I would get really mad if I got one that didn't have screws, they were welded shut, and that would piss me off, because the first thing I would do when I got home is unscrew them and very carefully remove them, and take these things out, these pads, anti-friction pads, out, and screw it back in, so that they were completely clear.

It's mostly there because when they duplicate these, they're doing it at 10 times the normal speed, and they have a little bit of carbon coat on them, and it's to keep the tape edges from wearing.

The later improvement, do you remember when TDK or Maxell came out with a tape that was in a metal frame and completely clear? And those were like 20 bucks and they were like freaking 5 pounds.

The other thing I'm looking at is how to make the vinyl record even cooler than it is, not just picture disks but kinetic sculpture, like imagine a record that is so precious to you that you want to hang it on the wall and look at it, and have a dedicated player that's literally a picture frame for the record that you just press it and turn it on.

That's intriguing.

Well there's a record player called the Columbia GP-3 which is a Japanese record player that they just stopped making maybe 5 years ago, and I have two of them, and they're basically toys, they run on 6 D batteries - the turntablist community goes crazy over them because you can unlock the motor and scratch with it, and you can take it to the park, and the amazing thing it does is it plays upright, it has mounting brackets.

It's not using gravity to hold the needle on the record, it's using a spring.

It doesn't feel too hard at all, it's

so light weight that something about the tension and the physics of it is designed to be able to do it, but it's not harmful at all, there's like a clamp to clamp the record so that it doesn't go anywhere, and it plays like this! And you can hang it on a wall!

I seem to remember something very similar to this when I was a kid in the late 60s.



The sound burger?

No, the form factor was just like yours. Who knows, maybe it was the same sort of thing, but it was battery operated, and the reason they did things that way, is because kids were always grabbing stuff and moving around with it, so they made things so you could pick it up and just move around with it.



So for my final project I'm cutting two records, which I will mount to two of my players on the wall, which will be left and right channels of a performance.

Oh wow. Audio Technica had one I could swear it was called the Mister Disk...

That's the other portable that's considered to be really good quality sound.

I swear to god I had one of these and the branding on it was Mr. Disk. You know actually it was kind of horrific, because you could barely touch it or it would skip.

The GP-3 is the most fantastic record player I've ever owned. It has one speaker, it has pitch control, you can disable the motor, and scratch on it. My daughter loves it. I went out and bought her all this vinyl. That's another thing we've lost, I grew up listening to stories on books and things with the records and stuff and kids don't have that anymore.

My parents had this exotic thing, it was a record player that had a little like, a slide projector but you put, it was kind of like a little film strip, but it wasn't like the kind you had at school that was the 35 mm kind that rolled up, it had like 6 slides and every so often the record would beep and you'd switch to the next one, and a picture would go on that track, there was only like 5 or 6 pictures for each side, but it was a very funny looking thing, it looked like a 10" t.v. with a record player on the top of it.

Kind of sounds like one of those viewmaster things.

Yeah it was kind of like that. <looks online> It was a show and tell!

Is that a projector?

Yeah, it was a projector.

That's not a 45.

It was a 7" and it went around like a 16 and 2.3 to get the most possible sound on a small record.

So that's the other thing I'm interested in experimenting with, is size and format. This one guy I'm working with can do backwards locked grooves. I've already done a locked grooves record, that's pretty cool.

There aren't a lot of people doing this, but I think an increasing demand. Lathe cuts are cool, bands don't want to do a albums because it's a big pain in the ass, and it costs a lot of money and there's also a pretty high risk factor where you have a thousand units at a bare minimum and you're stuck with these boxes of these records, and if they don't sell them then you're stuck with these boxes of these records that no-one wants, so, but they can do small runs of 50 and it's not a big deal and it doesn't cost you but a couple hundred bucks and they're collectible, like this band Wolf Eyes, like go on eBay and these lathe cuts are going for like hundreds of bucks, and some of them are highly regarded, it sort of depends, but it's like the rarification factor in full swing, it's the audio version of zine culture, you're making a one of a kind thing...

Yeah, I got this one

That looks like a peter king lathe cut.

I don't know what the hell this is.

WANDA JACKSON <laughs>

Yeah they do use a lot of these as, attention getters basically.

I'm imagining that some of this works on you, yes? How much impact the sleeve has on you, in terms of whether or not you're even going to check out a demo, like if you see something

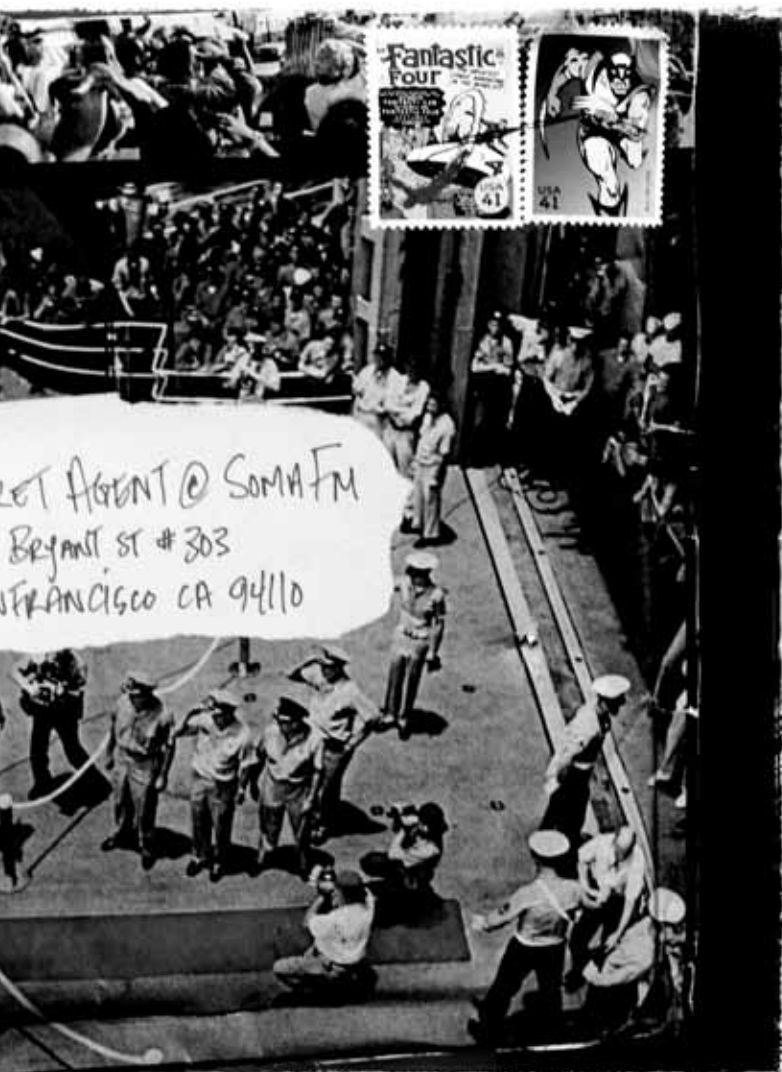


really well designed, you're going to check it out, whereas if you see something with like, Wanda Jackson, you're not even going to want to go there...

Well yeah,. in general with the stuff that comes in, you can know a song by it's packaging... you should see some of the crap that gets sent to us... it's like, if you don't care how you put your CD together, how can your music be good?

Would you say that the ratio of gold to crap is... more crap?

Oh god, yeah. 90 percent of the stuff



LET AGENT @ SOMAFM
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we get.

I mean, you're probably a storing house for people sending you crap.

Yeah, like this is a bunch of stuff that needs to be gone through over here, I mean, look at this, my god...

This is just going straight in the bin, right?

Yeah, most of this stuff is Elise's reject pile right here... I'm uau-ally more vicious, if I get stuff that looks bad, it goes in the trash. I mean, a lot of the rejects are a little too corporate...

It's so funny too how the corporate stuff actually has 'corporate' written all over it.

And this looks like... vanity peice.

Right... somebody that just can't give it up...

There's a lot of um,

There's a lot of hopes and dreams in that reject pile, Rusty.

There is..

Then there's this. Holy \$#@*. Did this get sent to you?

Yeah.

So you get good stuff...

Yeah, we get some good stuff sometimes... we got this lovely vinyl collection of dark ambient sent to us... this is an artist who sends us stuff who is very interesting, she's all over the road, but this is her latest release... it's a USB key shaped like a pill... now, the next pill I get in the mail won't be interesting... she sends us all these print peices of things.. she sends us little buttons and things... I mean, she pays attention to things...

So I think what you're saying is that design is really important.

It's totally important.

Physicality is important.

What will you do with those buttons, though? Is it something that just has the effect of, it's in your brain that they cared and so you care more?

I will probably pass these out to other people, like if I'm sending t-shirts, I will probably throw in a button too.

So it's totally working for them.

Yeah, it is.

case, where you can see it imbedded in a CD case, and it's a chip layout, and you plug it in to headphones, and you're listening to that chip, and it's 8-bit music, and it sounds fierce.

It's sad that it seems like too many people are saying recorded music is just a way to get promotion for people to make all of their money playing live, and the other thing even big acts like last year, I read some shocking numbers about the concert industry being really down last year, I don't see the big gains and a lot of money being made there either.

They're really not counting on the fact that it costs a hell of a lot of money to put on a show and do a tour, and it takes a certain calibre of artist to actually recoup the money... most touring bands basical-

was trained as an audio engineer who also composes, and looking at this as like any other medium like painting or drawing or graphic design, or anything else where you have to have a sustainable model in order for people to continue doing it.

One thing that's been kind of sad that the internet's done is it's kind of turned this whole generation of people into not having much value for we'll say intellectual property for lack of a better term, but creative art, and it's like, oh I just get it all for free, and not thinking about when you're in high school and you see yourself as being a musician or an artist and you just really want to get your stuff out there rather than be able to pay your bills with it, but that's because your mom and dad are subsidizing you by letting you live at home.

"they say you can't judge a book by it's cover, but actually you totally can, every time." - rusty hodge

ly make enough money to feed themselves and put gas in their car, and that's always been the case since I was a punker in the 80s, firehouse and minutemen and all of these guys who were awesome indie musicians, but they were not making money on either the albums or the shows, they were perpetually touring all the time and it was a punk lifestyle so it didn't really matter, they were living for their art... most people don't have the wherewithal to sacrifice the prime of their life to just live a punk rock dream.

It's fine when you're like 18.

Right, once your old and you need medical insurance, fuck that!

It's not real sustainable.

I guess so that's one of my things that I'm looking at, the fact that I

The other thing that is true to that point is that now everyone is a creator, and now that's a really good thing, we're giving the tools of media to everyone to be able to express themselves, and most of the time it's not about democracy it's about fart jokes and potty humor, but we're living in a time where that's actually decreased the value of intellectual property from people who have dedicated years and years of their lives to getting really good at something, because we're all sort of on the same level now and I think we have to go through that in order for people to come around.

We're not sort of on the same level.

But people think that it is.

It's like people buy a synthesizer with all the stuff like a ring tone and arpeggiator and with the tini-

est bit of skill, like you know one or two chords on a piano, you can make a really cool sounding arrangement, but guess what, a whole bunch of programming went into that, and they were created by musicians who knew how to do these super complicated things, and even though you're not coming up with those patterns, you think you are... and you start to

loops and patterns and rhythm loops, and people buy all the pieces and think they made a composition, and it does sound kind of cool but you don't have the same level of talent as people who made those pieces.

But I don't think an artist who does that is going to have a sustainable career because everything they do is going to sound like clip art.



see it in the early 80s when people could sell and distribute patches for synthesizers, and suddenly the synth players were just buying the patches and not learning how to run their instruments, and then it started getting into like, people buying drum

This was last week, worst selling number one record in history...

this week Cake had a new record coming out and it was less than this one... #1 sales of 52,000 units... CD sales...

San Francisco Chronicle

11.28.2005

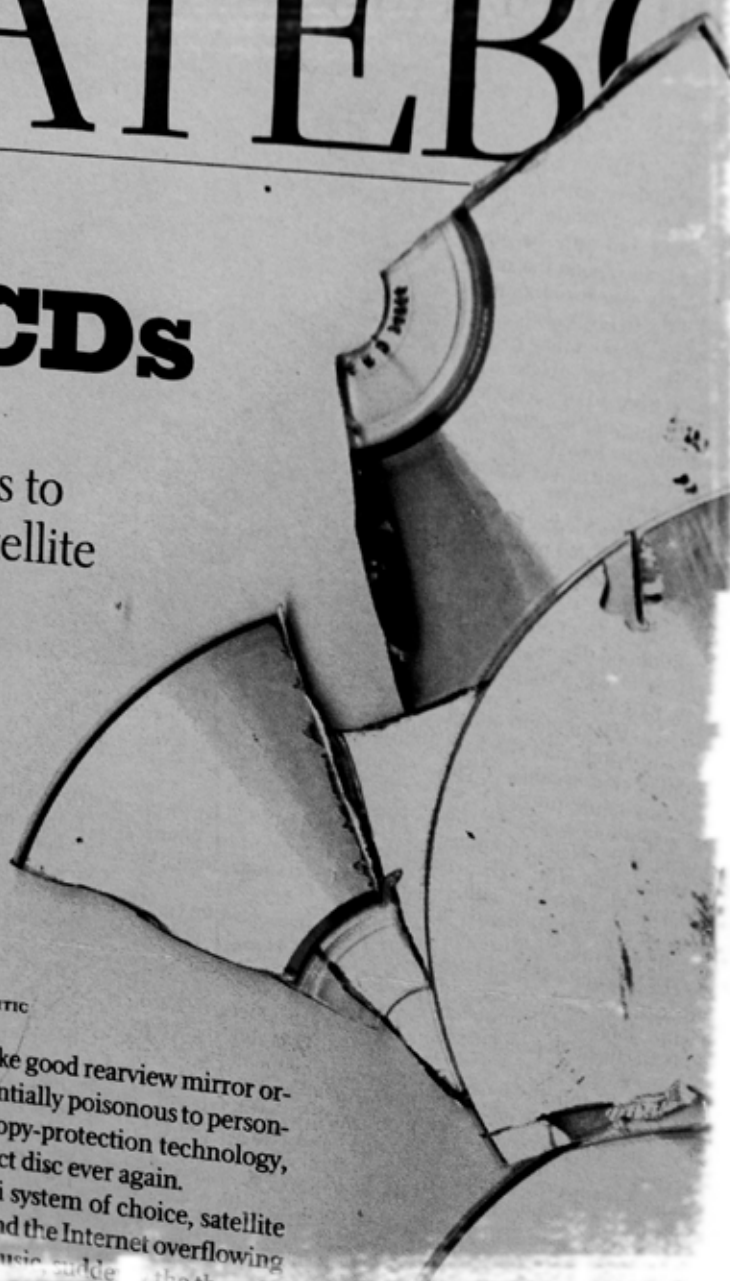
DATEBOOK

R.I.P. CDs

Consider the alternatives to compact discs: iPods, satellite radio and hours of free or cheap digital music to download legally. Begone, bright discs and pesky cases! Begone!

By Aidin Vaziri
CHRONICLE POP MUSIC CRITIC

They're overpriced, ugly and don't even make good rearview mirror ornaments. Now that we know they are also potentially poisonous to personal computers, thanks to Sony BMG's rogue copy-protection technology, there's really no reason to buy another compact disc ever again. With sleek iPods rapidly becoming the hi-fi system of choice, satellite radio offering hundreds of specialty stations, and the Internet overflowing with all kinds of free and cheap legal digital music, suddenly the thought of owning an awkward, bulky CD case seems like a thing of the past.



Worst selling number one? How is that even possible?

Because nobody is buying CDs... normally, to appear to be selling number one, you have to be selling 50,000, but now if you have 40,000 you're number one.

The number keeps decreasing every month.

So CDs are basically dead in the water.

You know I gotta even say sales of our groove salad CD have been really crappy.

I thought you were giving these away for donations?

People who do a donation specify what they want.

How many different things do you have?

T-shirts, hoodies, CDs, but in the last two months, CDs have just tanked, it's been really sudden, because before we used to move, two years ago we had 2 different CDs and we were doing like 4 or 5 a day, and now we're doing like 1 a day. Actually we sold 3 groove salad CDs today, that's good... but a couple days ago we weren't selling any... yesterday

we did a huge number in donations and we only did one CD... and the day before that, there were three CDs, but it's just been tanking lately, CD-wise. Just in the last 2 months I've been noticing it. I feel like it's that logarithmic thing, where it's been going like a steady decline, but now it's all of the sudden just dropping off the face of the planet.

I think people just only have so much room for anything like that in their lives, in their house, or whatever, and it's like, once you get to this point.

Well it's also like what's the dominant way people are listening to music now... they're listening to it on their iPods, on their phones, they have jacks to plug those things into their cars...

But it's disposable.

You collect it, but it just goes into this bottomless pit, you collect all this digital music and just file it away.

I think people don't realize that in 5 years, all this stuff people think they have, they're not going to have anymore. Digital has a lifespan that is much shorter than physical formats do. Because most people aren't aggressive enough about backing up.



A b c d e

f g h i j k l m n

DEATH

NEW IMPROVED FULL
PRESSURE

you

music has the right to children

v



B F G H I

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L DIMENSIONAL STEREO
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I believe in the power of media to be both highly personal and meaningful. I think that as we move further into the digital age, it becomes imperative to develop processes that utilize the relationships between the mind and hands, and the eyes and ears. For many years I had abandoned these things, but I think I always longed for them. I'm glad I found them once again.



// THE PAST IS IN THE PRESENT



Hanging record player with picture disk, concept by Sean Ross, 2010

make your own damn record

"artistic creation is the playback of ordinary experience—from trash to treasure."

— marshall mcluhan

Vinyl sales grew 14% in 2010, while the sales of CDs are falling like a stone. While LP records still account for less than 1% overall sales, this shows people still desire the analog artifact.

The market for new music is always driven by youth culture, with Generation Y currently being the largest demographic for music today at over 80 million kids worldwide. These young folk value individual self-expression and authenticity; the vintage culture of objects they didn't personally grow up with are fetishized as a reaction against the perfection and consumerist ideology of digital things. There is a pendulum swing amongst younger people away from the mass marketed and mass produced, exemplified by the lo-fi DIY culture which encompasses everything from etsy to zines to blogs. Online services such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook are less about consuming then creating, connecting and sharing.

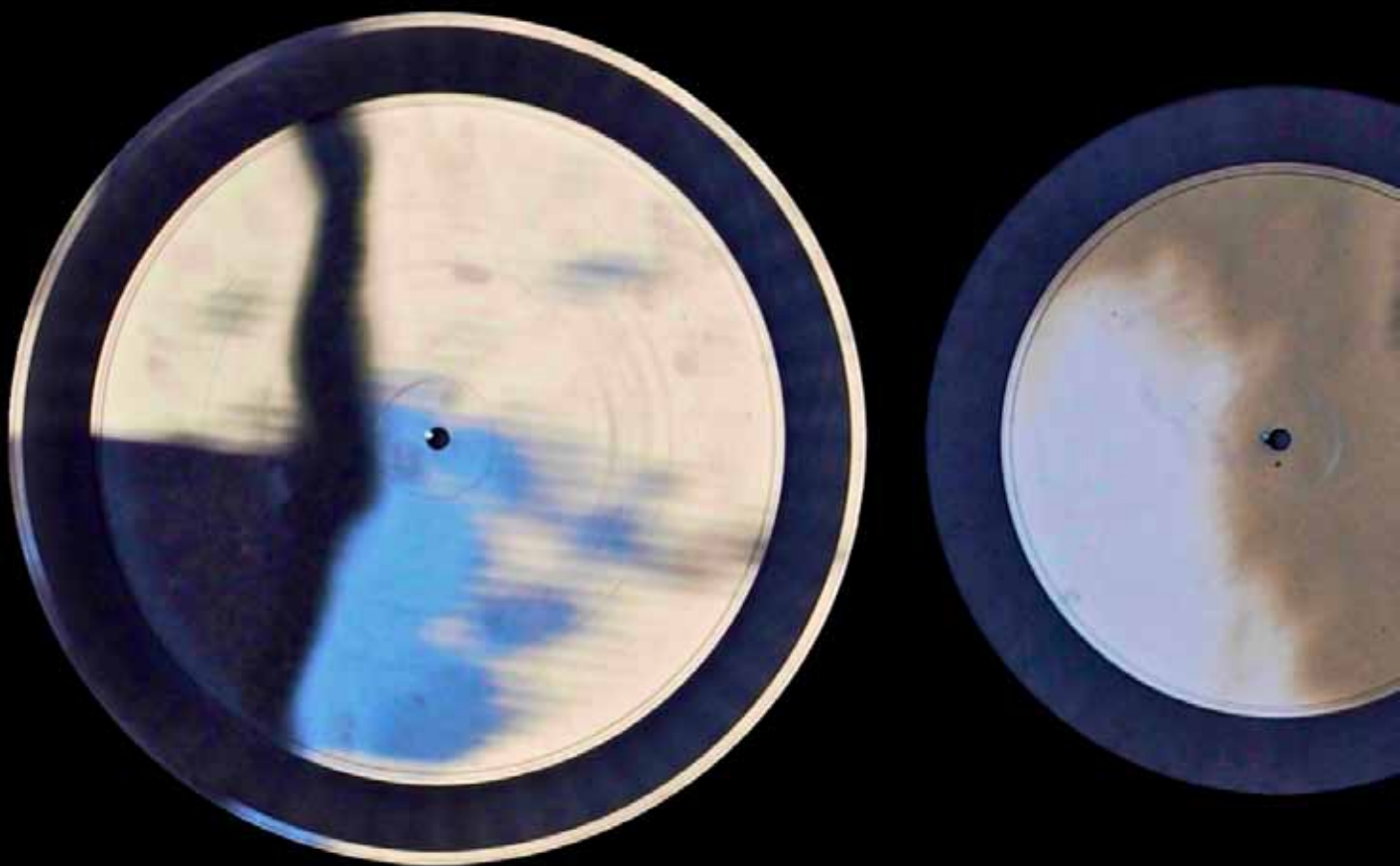
However, there is a problem with over-saturation in these digital environments as more and more products and services compete for this mindshare, with less and less substantively to differentiate these things from each other. Music today is a hard sell with most people getting content for free on-line, preferring to support their favorite acts by attending live shows. The stage is set, therefore, for the re-emergence of the vinyl record; this time as a means of highly personal and artistic expression and work of art.

"Make Your Own Damn Record" combines the best of analog and digital cultures, and perhaps new model for record companies that would allow everyone to produce unique one-off vinyl records, innovating on form and function and continuing to push a medium that has traditionally been locked by the gatekeepers of big media conglomerates.

// THE PAST IS IN THE PRESENT

“Make Your Own Damn Record” is about 3 things:

1. Crowdsourcing your best content. The record label of the 21st century is where everyone is the artist and everyone is a connoisseur.
2. Continuing to innovate where analog culture left off - in form and content, creating a platform for visual and sound/song artists to collaborate over distances.
3. Creating meaningful, tangible, playful and unique archival quality ‘records’ which blur the boundaries of digital and analog cultures, producing artifacts somewhere between the highly personal and the mass produced, universally adored ‘hit’.



make your own damn record



Set of 4 stacked records which play from the inside out, photographed in the Nave of CCA, San Francisco, Ca. by Sean Ross, 2011

COLUMBIA

PORTABLE PLAYER
MODEL 10-1

AC 115V

1.8

REVERSE

PAUSE

PLAY





these new forms that did so much to recover the vocal,
auditory, and mimetic world that had been repressed
by the printed word, also inspired the
strange new rhythms of "the jazz age,"



Interlocking puzzle / analog playlist record, Sean Ross, 2011



the various forms of syncopation
and symbolist discontinuity that, like relativity
and quantum physics, heralded the end of
the Gutenberg era with its smooth,
uniform lines of type and organization.

-marshall

mcluhan





The Lathe Cutter Sessions, 2010





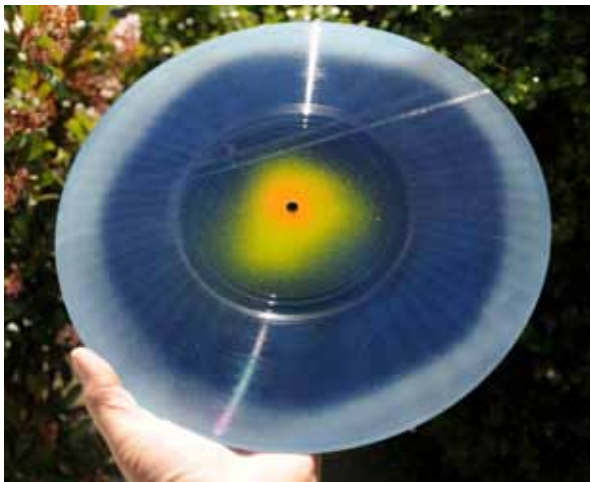
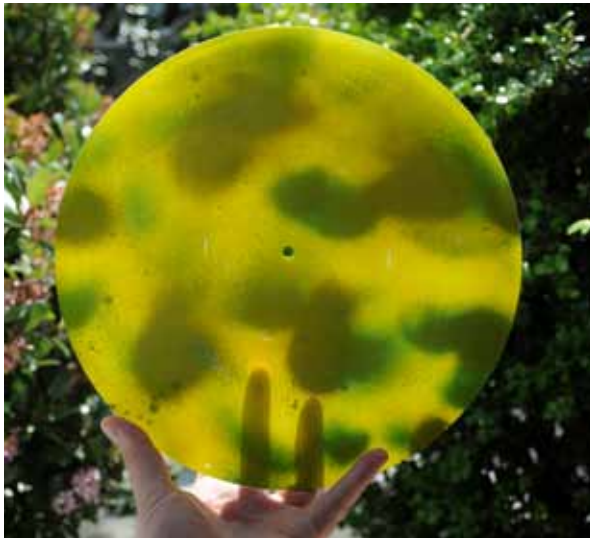
The Lathe Cutter Sessions, 2010



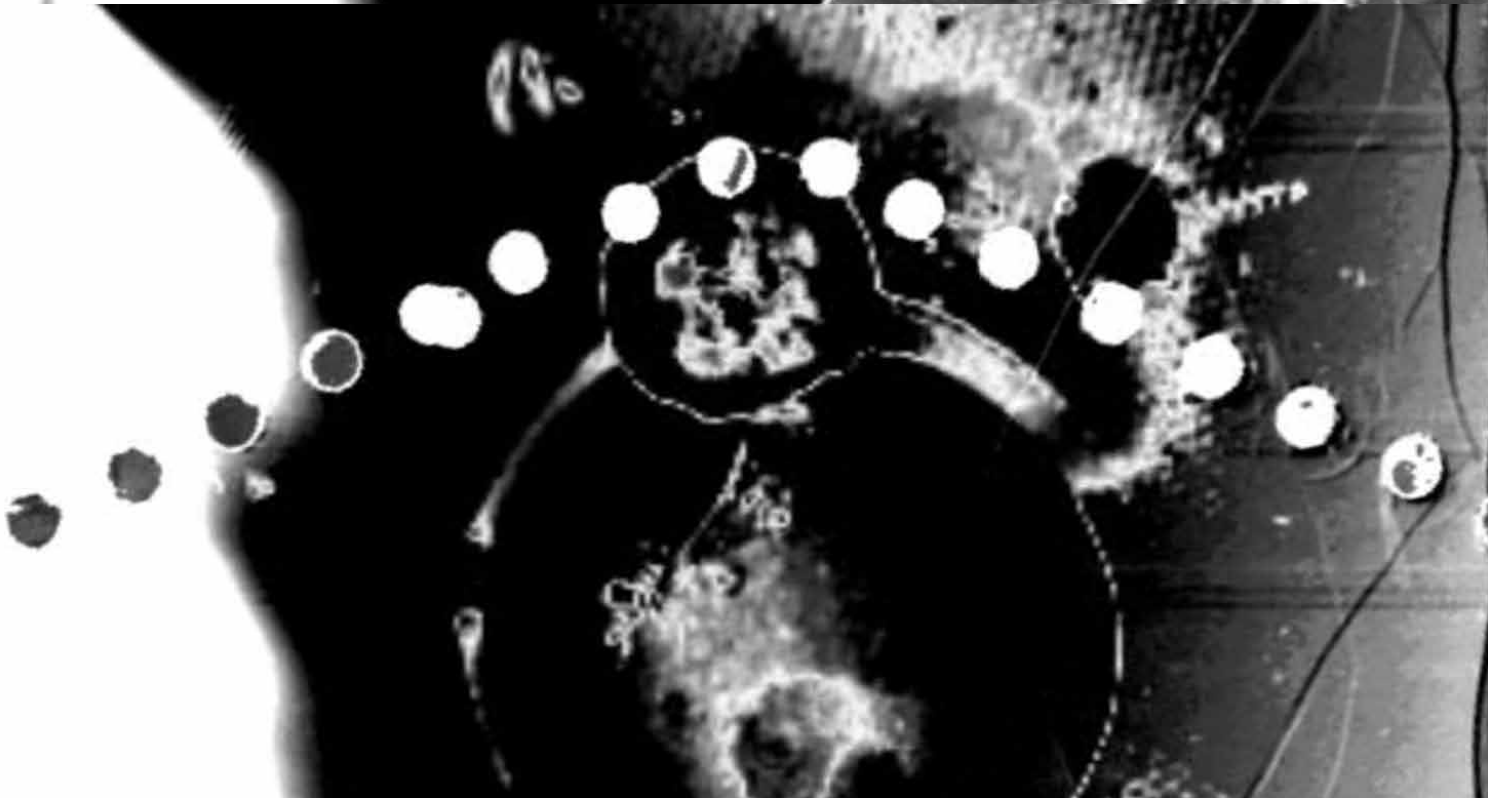
audio >> <http://www.dsstudio.com/the-lathe-cutter.html>



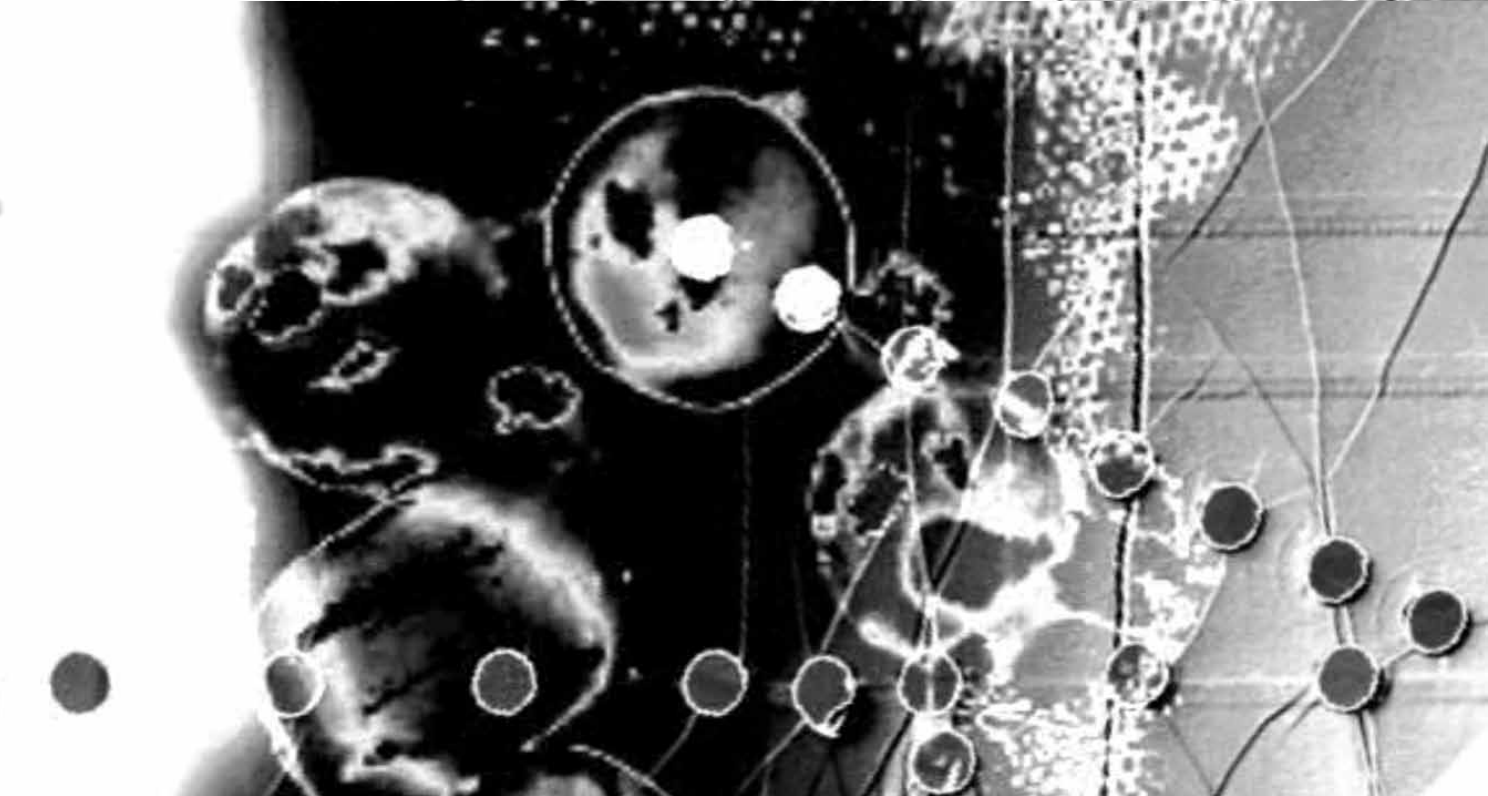
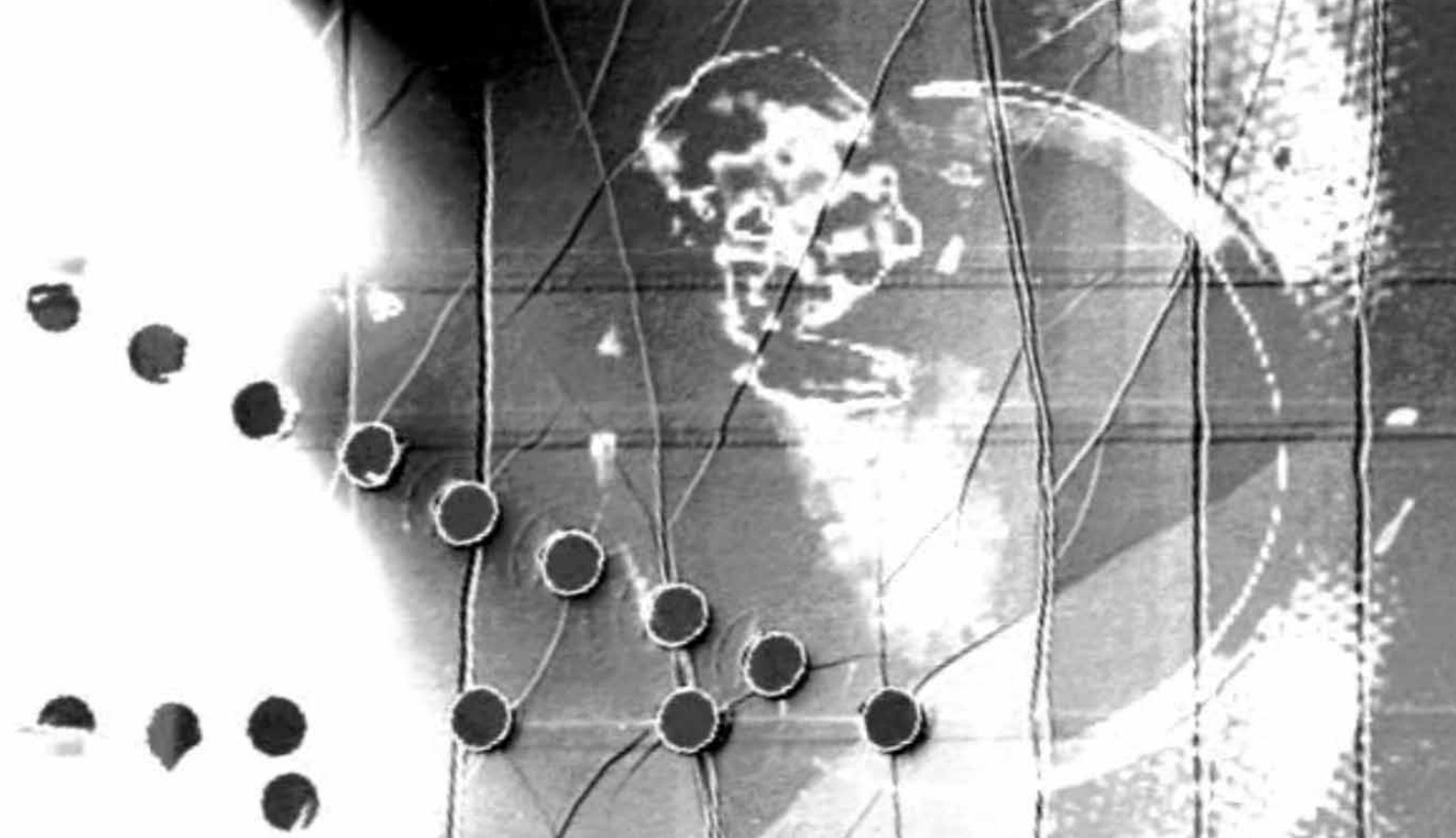




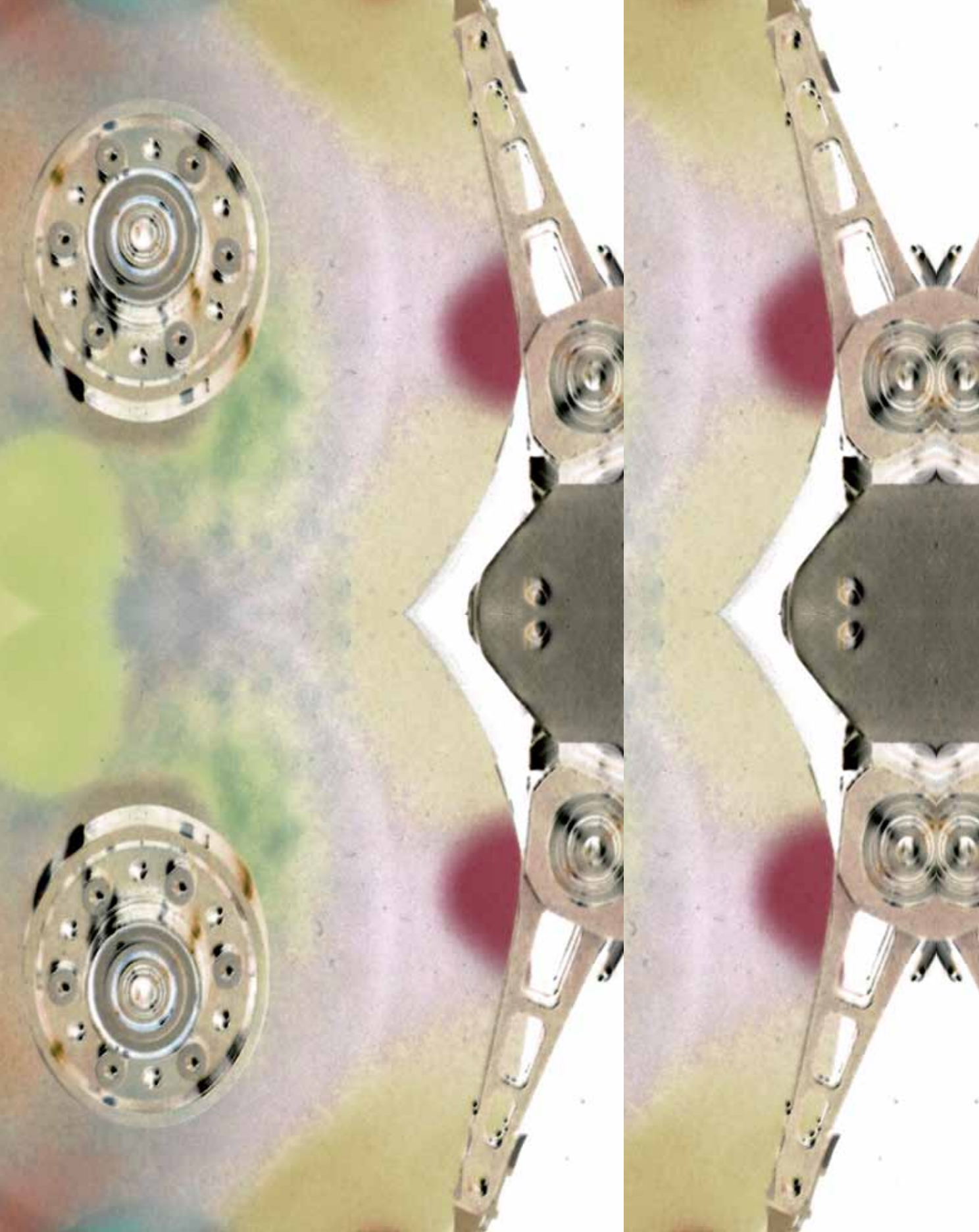
Hand made lathe cut one-off records, various program material, Sean Ross, 2011



“the composition”



video clip >> <http://vimeo.com/nn>



noise. random unwanted variation.

signal degradation.

as signal
is copied and re-copied or transmitted

over long distances, these apparently
random variations

become dominant.

noise creates signal loss and distortion. is

g e n e r a t i o n
l o s s e s

a desirable trait because it is uncontrolled

thus more human?

//

Aesthetics of Sound: Critical Analysis of Sound Design in Television and Motion Pictures, by Vinay Shrivastava

The ideology of sound may be seen as struggling against the dominant ideology of image. Mary Anne Doane suggests that the ideology of sound does not always work with the ideology of image, but in a way it opposes the dominance of visual ideology.

The Fantasmatic Body: Mary Ann Doane exposes a process of repression inherent in what is called “the classic style of filmmaking,” or “the dominant mode of filmmaking practice.” What she alleges as repressed is the material heterogeneity of the sound film; as she analyzes it, the film work involved in wedding sounds to visuals in a film is effaced so as to maximize an illusion of the real and position a unified subject. On familiar grounds, forcefully enunciated by Baudry, she contends that creation and maintenance of the illusion of the real serves important bourgeois ideological purposes.

The Baudrian argument is that the cinematic apparatus transforms what is before it but conceals that transformation by effacing traces of it. Bourgeois ideology in general functions in much the same way, masking its operations and presenting its object as natural when it is really a product of ideology.

Doane argues that the way sound is utilized in classic cinema contributes to the constitution of a fantasmatic body within the film text. Instead of using sound recording and sound editing to emphasize the separateness of visuals and sound in our experience of the film – the true state of affairs in our experience of film (as, for instance, Godard does in *Sympathy for the Devil*) – the classic cinema hides what is in fact the case, namely, that there are just sounds in our experience and there are just visuals in our experience with no real connections existing between them. What the classic cinema does is to make it seem as if the sounds and visuals belong to a body; this body has the visual qualities we see and emits the sounds we hear. Spectators of the film are addressed by the film with a particular point of identification, the fantasmatic body, serving to anchor the experience. This body authorizes and sustains certain relationships between sound and image, and has several important characteristics... (namely) unity...

Sound Theory: Christian Metz

Metz explains that the primary qualities are in general visual and tactile, whereas secondary qualities are auditory and olfactory. According to Metz, a complete identification occurs when we know the sound and source of sound. Culturally (and also linguistically) the source of the sound is the object; the sound itself is a “characteristic.” In the present mode of the culture, sound is an attribute, or a non-object. This conception favors the source of sound in place of the sound’s actual characteristics. Metz gives more importance to image than to sound because the source of sound is a visible object.

•

“a tape recorder is an externalized section of the human nervous system

you can find out more about the nervous system and gain more control over your reactions by using the tape recorder than you could find out sitting twenty years in the lotus posture or wasting your time on the analytic couch. listen to your present time tapes and you will begin to see who you are and what you are doing here mix yesterday in with today and hear tomorrow your future rising out of old recordings you are a programmed tape recorder set to record and play back

who programs you

who decides what tapes to play back in present time

who plays back your old humiliations and defeats holding you in prerecorded present time

you don’t have to listen to that sound you can program your own playback you can decide what tapes you want played back in present time study your associational patterns and find out what cases in what prerecordings for playback program those old tapes out it’s all done with tape recorders...

What are newspapers doing but selecting the ugliest sounds for playback” – **William S. Burroughs, “The Invisible Generation”**

bibliography

“That’s why I like the old-fashioned turntable: because it’s so dumb. You can hit it, you can do all these things, and it will never stop playing. The CD players are too smart.” – **Christian Marclay**

Acoustic space is a dwelling place for anyone who has not been conquered by the one-at-a-time, uniform ethos of the alphabet.

In any cultural arrangement, trouble always occurs when only one sense is subjected to a barrage of energy and receives more stimulus than all the others. For modern Western man that would be the visual state.

As psychologists understand sense ratios, overstimulation and understimulation can cause thought and feeling to separate. Sleeping may be regarded as a dimming down of one or two sensory inputs. Hypnosis, on the other hand is a steady assault on one sense, like a tribal drumbeat. Modern torturers in Chile break down prisoners by putting them in cells where everything—walls, furniture, utensils, window covers—is painted white. In Vietnam, Communist interrogators discovered (as police interrogators everywhere) that unexpected beatings and random electric shocks create sharp peaks of floating anxiety and subsequently a ready uncritical conviction.

Without being aware of it, North Americans have created the same kind of violence for themselves. Western man thinks with only one part of his brain and starves the rest of it. By neglecting ear culture, which is too diffuse for the categorical hierarchies of the left side of the brain, which is principally concerned with pattern recognition of an artistic and holistic quality, grasps the relationship between diverse parts readily and is not bound up with a rigid sequence of deductions. – **Marshall McLuhan, visual and acoustic space**

“I think one of the things that’s going to be nauseatingly characteristic about so much music of now is its glossy production values and its griddedness, the tightness of the way everything is locked together.” – **Brian Eno**

“I was in the studio with a group of musicians, who shall remain nameless, and I said to them “Our exercise today is not to use ‘undo’ at all. So, there’s no second takes. Or, if you do a second take, you have to do the whole take. There’s no sort of drop in, change that little bit. The session broke down in, I’d say, 40 minutes. It was impossible for people to work in that restriction any longer. It was something I advocated for years, that you can make music in studios, music doesn’t have to be made as a real-time experience. But now you see the results of that in people who are completely crippled unless they know that they have the possibility of “cut and paste” and “undo.” And “undo” and “undo” and “undo” and “undo” and “undo” again. – **Brian Eno**

“Often these labels are run by the artists themselves, who release their own music and distribute it via networks where they do not have to compromise their ideals.”

“Everything about these self-released records was lo-fi: from the photocopied paper sleeves and rubber-stamped label to the cheapest pressing they could find. The aim was to produce the record for as little money as possible, to make it accessible to their audience. They were created with wild enthusiasm, as evident in the immediacy of the form.”

– **DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture**

Editing, or montage, is the key twentieth century technology for creating fake realities. Theoreticians of cinema have distinguished between many kinds of montage but, for the purposes of sketching the archeology of the technologies of simulation leading to digital compositing, The first technique is temporal montage: separate realities form consecutive moments in time. The second technique is montage within a shot. It is the opposite of the first: separate realities form contingent parts of a single image. Examples of montage within a shot include the superimposition of a few images and multiple screens used by the avant-garde filmmakers in the 1920’s (for instance, superimposed images in Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera*).

While the dominant use of digital compositing is to create a seamless virtual space, it does not have to be subordinated to this goal. The borders between different worlds do not have to be erased; the different spaces do not have to be matched in perspective, scale and lighting; the individual layers can retain their separate identity rather than being merged into a single space; the different worlds can clash semantically rather than form a single universe.

//

This is why Vertov's film has a particular relevance to new media. It proves that it is possible to turn "effects" into a meaningful artistic language. Why in the case of Witney's computer films and music videos the effects are just effects, while in the hands of Vertov they acquire meaning? Because in Vertov's film they are motivated by a particular argument, this being that the new techniques to obtain images and manipulate them, summed up by Vertov in his term "kino-eye," can be used to decode the world. As the film progresses, "straight" footage gives way to manipulated footage; newer techniques appear one after one, reaching a roller coaster intensity by the film's end, a true orgy of cinematography. It is as though Vertov re-stages his discovery of the kino-eye for us. Along with Vertov, we gradually realize the full range of possibilities offered by the camera. Vertov's goal is to seduce us into his way of seeing and thinking, to make us share his excitement, his gradual process of discovery of film's new language. This process of discovery is film's main narrative and it is told through a catalog of discoveries being made. Thus, in the hands of Vertov, a database, this normally static and "objective" form, becomes dynamic and subjective. More importantly, Vertov is able to achieve something which new media designers and artists still have to learn — how to make database and narrative merge into a new form."

Can the loop be a new narrative form appropriate for the computer age? It is relevant to recall that the loop gave birth not only to cinema but also to computer programming. Programming involves altering the linear flow of data through control structures, such as 'if/then' and 'repeat/while'; the loop is the most elementary of these control structures.... As the practice of computer programming illustrates, the loop and the sequential progression do not have to be thought as being mutually exclusive. A computer program progresses from start to end by executing a series of loops.

1. New media is analog media converted to a digital representation. In contrast to analog media which is continuous, digitally encoded media is discrete.

2. All digital media (text, still images, visual or audio time data, shapes,

3D spaces) share the same the same digital code. This allows different media types to be displayed using one machine, i.e., a computer, which acts as a multimedia display device.

3. New media allows for random access. In contrast to film or videotape

which store data sequentially, computer storage devices make possible to access any data element equally fast.

4. Digitization involves inevitable loss of information. In contrast to an analog representation, a digitally encoded representation contains a fixed amount of information.

5. In contrast to analog media where each successive copy loses quality, digitally encoded media can be copied endlessly without degradation.

6. New media is interactive. In contrast to traditional media where the order of presentation was fixed, the user can now interact with a media object. In the process of interaction the user can choose which elements to display or which paths to follow, thus generating a unique work. Thus the user becomes the co-author of the work.

In reality, there is actually much more degradation and loss of information between copies of digital images than between copies of traditional photographs. A single digital image consists of millions of pixels. All of this data requires considerable storage space in a computer; it also takes a long time (in contrast to a text file) to transmit over a network. Because of this, the software and hardware used to acquire, store, manipulate, and transmit digital images uniformly rely on lossy compression -- the technique of making image files smaller by deleting some information. The example of lossy compression technique is JPEG format used to store still images and MPEG, used to store digital video on DVD. The technique involves a compromise between image quality and file size -- the smaller the size of a compressed file, the more visible are the visual artifacts introduced in deleting information. Depending on the level of compression, these artifacts range from barely noticeable to quite pronounced.

bibliography

One may argue that this situation is temporary and once cheaper computer storage and faster networks become commonplace, lossy compression will disappear. However, presently the trend is quite the reverse with lossy compression becoming more and more the norm for representing visual information. If a single digital image already contains a lot of data, this amount increases dramatically if we want to produce and distribute moving images in a digital form (one second of video, for instance, consists of 30 still images). Digital television with its hundreds of channels and video on-demand services, the distribution of full-length films on DVD or over Internet, fully digital post-production of feature films -- all of these developments are made possible by lossy compression. It will be a number of years before the advances in storage media and communication bandwidth will eliminate the need to compress audio-visual data. So rather than being an aberration, a flaw in the otherwise pure and perfect world of the digital, where even a single bit of information is never lost, lossy compression is the very foundation of computer culture, at least for now.

Therefore, while in theory computer technology entails the flawless replication of data, its actual use in contemporary society is characterized by the loss of data, degradation, and noise; the noise which is often even stronger than that of traditional analog media.

There is another way to think about the difference between new media design and new media art in relation to the content — interface dichotomy. In contrast to design, in art the connection between content and form (or, in the case of new media, content and interface) is motivated. That is, the choice of a particular interface is motivated by work's content to such degree that it can no longer be thought of as a separate level. Content and interface merge into one entity, and no longer can be taken apart.

- Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*

b i b l i o g r a p h y

Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound by Eric Tamm

Eno is an important conceptual thinker in not only the musical realm, but he is well known as a design thinker as well. Eno has positioned his work in a much broader context that transcends traditional boundaries of art and music. From creating "Ambient" Music for Airports, to designing a game around creative process (Oblique Strategies), to making iPhone applications Trope and Bloom, Eno is more about the process than the results, with the results most always being spectacular. His works are designed experiences as well as design strategies.

Christian Marclay: "Festival" Exhibit in NYC at the Whitney Museum of American Art / Festival (Publication) Issues 1&2 / Christian Marclay: Monograph by Phaidon

Christian Marclay is a visual artist and composer who explores connections between visual and sound art. He is considered to be the "unwitting inventor of turntablism". Examples of his work include collaging comic book text to create musical scores, playing sliced up and recombined LP records, which serve as both visually intriguing artifacts as well as music concrete. The "Festival" exhibit I saw involved audiences generating musical scores on a giant blackboard for later interpretation by a host of musicians. His work is relevant to my area of interest because it straddles the middle ground between visual and sound art.

Cover Art By: New Music Graphics

Focuses on the work of 30 international designers/labels who are the most influential in the field of package design for musical recordings today. Essays discuss the current climate/scene for music graphics, and most importantly reinforces that there is still a healthy market for making records with beautiful art, and thoughtful, innovative packaging.

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Typography as Lyrics

It's been said that great typography is like music. These designers explore using music lyrics directly in typographic layouts.

<http://www.musicphilosophy.co.uk>

Typo Lyrics: the Sound of Fonts <http://www.slanted.de/shop/typolyrics>

Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/search/?q=typography%20lyrics&w=all>

Notations 21 "A Celebration of Innovations in Visual Notation"

The works in this book are experiments in musical notation that stand alone as beautiful works of abstraction, which work as music but also visual art. A very diverse range of visual styles and philosophies work as a compendium of possible strategies for generating music with art, or art with music.

Sight & Sound: Music & Abstraction in Australian Art (Exhibit at the Arts Center, Melbourne, Australia)

Similar in theme to the works in the aforementioned book Notations 21. This exhibit showcases Australian artists who use musical works as the basis for abstract art.

Factory Records: The Complete Graphic Album

Record label started in the late 70s out of the Manchester post-punk scene in the UK, most notable for records by Joy Division and New Order. Most well-known designer was Peter Saville, who's signature style defined the label's visual look. As with most of the artwork I've researched that was designed around the LP, I can't imagine this style of design working as well in digital formats, as most of the sleeves are clearly designed with print in mind, and beg to be touched.

Vaughan Oliver: Visceral Pleasures

Vaughan Oliver is a graphic designer who's work is synonymous with the record label 4AD, also out of the UK in the 1980's. I have been impressed with Oliver's work since I was a teenager, and have been so affected by his visual treatments of the music of my adolescence which has graced the packaging designs of some of my favorite bands of the era, from the Pixies, to the Cocteau Twins, to This Mortal Coil. Vaughan's collaborations with photographer Simon Larbalestier popularized the 'corrosive' look which soon became co-opted and overused. Vaughan's work has become inseparable from the label's sound, and is one of the best examples of a designer who was able to create a strong visual brand that told the stories inside the music.

Some People Can't Surf: The Graphic Design of Art Chantry

Art Chantry's work is most often attached to the Grunge scene of the early 90s, and is one of the primary creators behind the visual style of the Pacific Northwest. His work for bands and gigs are simply some of the best around. Art sees his design work as the mining of subcultures.

The Small Stakes: Music Posters by Jason Munn

Jason Munn is one of the more prolific and innovative designers working in the music scene today, and this monograph showcases some breathtaking visual concepts, all of which display an incredible amount of design restraint and timeless visual class. I enjoy his modernist approach to telling the visual story of the music event with a clever visual twist that leaves you at times laughing out loud, and an elegant use of space.

additional

books

Reasons to be Cheerful: The Life and Work of Barney Bubbles, Paul Gorman

bibliography

Town of Mirrors: The Reassembled Imagery of Robert Pollard, (Monograph) intro by Rick Moody
 Modern Dog: 20 Years of Poster Art (Monograph)
 Art that Moves: The Work of Len Lye, Roger Horrocks
 Cracked Media: The Sound of Malfunction, Caleb Kelly
 Woody Guthrie Artworks, Steven Bower and Nora Guthrie
 Flashback: Retro Design in Contemporary Graphics
 The Fundamentals of Sonic Art and Sound Design, Tony Gibbs
 Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music, Edited by Christoph Cox & Daniel Warner
 Juxtapoz Poster Art
 Machine Musicianship, Robert Rowe
 Handmade Electronic Music: The Art of Hardware Hacking, Nicholas Collins
 Made You Look, Stefan Sagmeister

other

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The Acrade Fire: The Wilderness Downtown - <http://www.thewildernessdowntown.com>

This is one of the possible 'futures' of music videos and one of the latest uses of dynamic data on the web in a musical context. Only plays in Google's Chrome browser, the video makes extensive use of Google's Maps capabilities to put your very own childhood home smack in the middle of the action.

Project Thirty Three

An ongoing curated collection of vintage record sleeves that convey their message with simple shapes like circles and dots.

<http://www.projectthirtythree.com/>

American Poster Institute

The American Poster Institute is a non-profit corporation dedicated to furthering public awareness and appreciation of the poster art form. Has a huge archive of music related posters. <http://www.americanposterinstitute.com/>

Tim Thompson

<http://nosuch.com/tjt/>

Tim gave a talk last semester in my Music, Sound & Technology class taught by Guillermo Gallindo. Tim writes software and makes art that exists between the visual and sound realms, which often involve audience interaction.

Paste Magazine's Top 25 Best Album Covers of the Decade (2000-2009)

<http://www.pastemagazine.com/blogs/lists/2009/11/the-25-best-album-covers-of-the-decade-2000-2009.html>

Boomkat

<http://boomkat.com/>

Another great example of album art not being dead, not by a long shot.

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iso50<http://www.iso50.com>

Blog of designer/musician Scott Hansen/Tycho

Mark Weaver<http://mrkwvr.com>

Designer who does beautiful album art, most notably for the new Nine Inch Nails side project "How to Destroy Angels"

GigPosters.com<http://www.gigposters.com>

Another incredible archive of music gig posters

To Have and to Hold<http://grainedit.com/2010/04/22/vinyl-documentary-to-have-to-hold/>

A new documentary from Jony Lyle that celebrates and explores the phenomenon of collecting vinyl.

a r t i c l e s

Return of graphic notation<http://newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=5462>**Psychoacoustics**<http://www.appliedmusic.com/psycho.html>**Gallery of graphic notation**http://blog.wfmu.org/freeform/2007/01/gallery_of_musi.html**Cardew object**<http://www.veralistcenter.org/tag/musical-performance>**Cornelius Cardew Scratch Music****Visible Deeds of Music**http://books.google.com/books?id=yYkGlzUr3yQC&pg=PA34&dq=music+and+visual+art+book&hl=en&ei=EE2UTIGgJY2ksQPmhPDACg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CDQQ6AEwATgU#v=onepage&q=music%20and%20visual%20art%20book&f=false

Composer Maryanne Amacher's website contains some interesting writings and bibliography regarding her experiments on perception:

http://www.maryanneamacher.org/Amacher_Archive_Project/Amacher_Archive_Project.html<http://archive.futuresonic.com/sensesonic/archive/MARYANNE/msg-0001.html><http://www.colba.net/~eliot/amacher.htm>

Ars Electronica and Stanford CCRMA webpages

http://www.aec.at/index_de.php<https://ccrma.stanford.edu/> Take a look at Music, multimedia, art and technology and science

i o u r n a l s

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The Hidden Sense: Synesthesia in Art and Science (Leonardo Books)

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Psychoacoustics: Facts and Models (Springer Series in Information Sciences)

Hugo Fastl, Eberhard Zwicker

Music, Cognition, and Computerized Sound: An Introduction to Psychoacoustics

Digital Harmony: On the Complementarity of Music and Visual Art

Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music Since 1900

Give my regards to Eighth Street: collected writings of Morton Feldman

Digital harmony : on the complimentarity of music and visual art by John Witney

Performa : new visual art performance by RoseLee Goldberg

Kerry Brougher ... [et al.] ; essay by Olivia

Matis. Imprint [London] : Thames & Hudson ; Washington, D.C. : Hirshhorn Museum ; Los Angeles : Museum of Contemporary Art, c2005.

Audio visual : on visual music and related media / edited by Cornelia and Holger Lund

Imprint Stuttgart : Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2009

The neural imagination: aesthetic and neuroscientific approaches to the arts

Samuel Beckett and the arts : music, visual arts, and non-print media

Author Damiani, Bruno Mario. Title Montemayor's Diana, music, and the visual arts

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There are errors and omissions in this book.

I did the best I could in the time I had to comprehensively document all of my work as well as make the design and content of this book as flawless as possible, but I had to go to press leaving a few details unfinished.

Thanks to everyone who took the time to help me make this work what it is.
To all the future CCA Design Grads, Be Excellent!

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