



**From Signal to Atmosphere,**

# **Record**

**and the Spaces between Silence and Noise**

**A Thesis Book by Amy Auman**

## How to read this book

The format of *Record* offers a variety of ways to experience the book. In the split sections, the top half-pages highlight project documentation and sources of artistic influence. The bottom half-pages reveal the thoughts behind the work, including essays, project descriptions and process documentation. You can read through the top and bottom simultaneously or in the sequence of your choice. To take an alternate journey through the book, visit the audio tour at [recordandrecord.com](http://recordandrecord.com). Headphones are highly recommended.

For Michael

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“I think of all the senses as being unified. I do not consider sound as separate from image. We usually think of the camera as an ‘eye’ and the microphone as an ‘ear’, but all the senses exist simultaneously in our bodies, interwoven into one system that includes sensory data, neural processing, memory, imagination and all the mental events of the moment. This all adds up to create the larger phenomenon we call experience.”

—BILL VIOLA

FORE

## Abstract

*Record* is both a noun and a verb. Its meaning shifts through pronunciation, beginning with our cognitive interpretation and then emerging as a translation that we project from our mouths. This thesis book is an artifact, or record, of the past two years of artistic inquiry. My work, however, lives through movement in time—it records my impulses. This thesis is merely an open archive.

A range of stimuli competes for our conscious attention. The signals we choose to notice emerge from the periphery of our atmosphere, which includes everything from noise to silence. I use design to amplify and alter signals and background noise to create unexpected and mysterious new experiences from the everyday. Leveraging the visual, aural and kinetic, my work celebrates the variation of individual perception, while bringing awareness to the exchanges we have with other people and species in the shared environments we inhabit.

The works in this thesis employ transposition between digital and analog spaces, cinematic storytelling through installation and documentation, and narrative shifts while moving in and out of different mediums. I use film and audio to capture these experiences. I grasp at the intangible, invisible forces of daily life—sound, light and the fleeting essence of movement and conversation.

# Glossary of Terms

(all terms written by me, with consultation from others)

## Acoustics

The science of sounds specifically regarding their nature, phenomena, and laws.

## Anechoic chamber

A room designed to be void of sound either entering or reflecting within the space. It blocks reflections of both sound waves and electromagnetic waves. A person in an anechoic chamber only hears direct sounds coming from within that room.

## Bioacoustics

The study of sounds produced by or affecting humans, animals and other living things, and how these sounds reflect communication and the relationship between living things and their environments.

## Binaural

Hearing with two ears, which allows living things to spatially orient sounds in the environment. This can be translated to headphones using technology that considers head size and ear shape to recreate the experience of hearing in 360 degrees.

## Cinematic storytelling

Sharing a narrative with others, either in a social or cultural context, via motion picture. Motion pictures appear to be in continuous motion, but are actually an optical illusion caused by a rapid series of still frames put together.

## Conversation

A verbal and sometimes physically expressive exchange of information and ideas, which can be expressed in the form of audio or written word. Conversation often takes the shape of informal dialogue.

## Decibel

The unit of measurement for a sound's intensity, or volume.

## Dynamics

The moving moral and/or physical forces of any kind, or the laws which relate to them. In mechanics, it refers to the motion of bodies and the act of forces that produce or change their motion—also known as kinetics.

## Editing

The process of organizing and distilling content, which could be written, audible or visual. Editing can involve organizing, trimming, adding and correcting.

## Environment

The natural world, either wholly or within a particular geographic area, especially in its relationship to the human impact in that area. It can also refer to the surroundings or habitat in which a person, animal or plant lives or occupies.

## Experience

A characteristic, key event, or situation that occurs within a human's existence.

## Extinction

The act of extinguishing or destroying. It is the ceasing to exist of a species, language or technology to the point where the last member of its kind will never again return.

## Frequency

The speed in a sound's vibration, measured in hertz. Mathematically, it is the speed of sound divided by its wavelength. Frequency determines a sound's pitch.

## Hertz

The unit of measurement for a sound's frequency, or pitch. It is the number of wave cycles that occur in one second.

## Infrasound

Extremely low frequencies that cannot be detected by the human ear. It is specific to sounds below 20 hertz, which is considered the typical limit of human hearing.

## Interaction

Communication between people or between people and a designed object or space. Interaction can also be actions of people that affect others.

## Juxtaposition

Being placed closely or side-by-side, often to compare or contrast or to create an interesting or unexpected effect.

**Mono** (1-channel), **stereo** (2-channel), **3D sound** (surround sound plus height)

## Natural

Existing in nature or created by the forces of nature, as opposed to being made by humans.

## Noise

Everything that makes up the background. When specific to audio, it includes all sounds that are not signal. A noise can become signal when one chooses to pay attention to it.

**Play**

To engage in a sport, game or lively recreation for the purpose of amusement.

**Projection**

The display of an image on a surface using light, such as a movie screen or the output from a projector. It may also refer to the delivery of sound from a body or a speaker, i.e., "She projected her voice when on stage."

**Record**

To preserve the memory of something by remembering, repeating, or committing it to writing, film or audio track.

**Reflection**

A re-direction of a wave when bounced off another surface (not absorbed). Light, sound and water waves are common materials that reflect. Reflection can also refer to the process of close examination in hindsight.

**Reverb**

Short for reverberation, reverb refers to a buildup of reflections from an electronically-generated sound, that then decays into an echo effect.

**Signal**

That which is intended to be heard or noticed. It is the figure, and everything else (silence and noise) is the ground.

**Silence**

The absence of sound. This could be a pause in between words in a conversation or a space equipped with sound-proofing measures. Sound depends on silence in order to be heard.

**Sound**

A phenomena in physics whereby vibrations travel through air or another medium, then are transmitted to the ears and perceived by the brain.

**Sound wave**

The compression and and decompression of a medium, such as air, caused by the movement of energy traveling through that medium via vibration.

**Soundscape**

The sound composition in any given environment. Soundscapes are landscapes of sound.

**Soundscape ecology**

A growing field of study on the acoustic relationships between living organisms and the their environment. Soundscape ecologists use sound data to track changes in ecosystems over time.

**Space**

An area or expanse which exists in three dimensions, although modern physicists usually consider it to be part of a boundless four-dimensional continuous sequence with time known as spacetime.

**Subversion**

Turning from the conventional way of doing or experiencing something. A transformation from the norm.

**Time**

A period of duration which occurs in the past, present or future.

**Track**

To follow the course or trail of someone or something, typically in order to find them or note their data, such as location, at various points. To log a path or trajectory.

**Transitory**

Occurring only for a short time. Fleeting. Ephemeral.

**Transpose**

To transfer or switch to another position or place. An exchange or transfer.

**Volume**

How loud or soft a sound is perceived, determined by the amplitude of a sound wave. The bigger the amplitude, the louder the sound. Volume is measured in decibels. It is also used to describe the amount of space occupied in three dimensions (length, width, height).



Heights bother my husband Michael. Ledges, to be more specific. We both enjoy hiking, but once we face a ledge, his vertigo kicks in. I wander to the precipice, the whole time relaying to him that I'm still safe. The height invigorates me. I skydived once at the end of college. The sensation was phenomenal. To see the world from such an expansive view—the trees look like the ones in those tiny architectural models, the farmland makes outlines in the landscape in a particularly graphic way. It doesn't seem natural, yet all indicators point to the fact that this view is just as real as any other. The idea of reality depends on many factors, but above all, it depends on perspective.

In perspective drawings, the horizon line and the focal point do not exist in real space, but their identification creates an architectural reconstruction. The building doesn't have those angles in reality, so why does drawing in this way make it somehow seem more real? Our senses tie us to our realities—our memories, sensations, experiences and subjectivity.

Jeffrey Weiss writes in "Deceptive Practice," "In that it serves illusion, perspective is a form of deceit. It show us something that isn't there or exaggerates something that is."<sup>1</sup> But is the perspective of illusion truly deceit? Perhaps, but deceit can be magical. The experience of magic is real, even if the wizard behind the curtain reveals its secrets.

Language often so utterly fails to provide true meaning. How can we communicate what is in our heads to someone who isn't? Before coming to RISD, I worked as an information designer. I displayed facts in a simple, easy-to-access way. What if accessibility went beyond easy understanding, and moved toward a feeling, or a sense?

<sup>1</sup>

Jeffrey Weiss, "Deceptive Practice," in *Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018. (111).

I use visuals, sound and movement of bodies through spaces to distill and elevate perception. My work heightens the senses to celebrate individual experience at the same time it asks to consider shared experiences and the richness of *being* in our ecosystems.

I recently thought about my first true love—the sport of gymnastics—and how it ties into my design work now. Gymnasts rely wholly on self-awareness in order to execute skills. You use sight, spotting the end of the beam when upside-down to determine your angle and the amount of space left for your foot. When releasing from the high bar, you look toward the low bar to catch it with your hands. Movement and touch make the skills possible. They may appear to be “tricks,” but the skills come out of hard work, strength and physics. Kinetics is science. It’s when science and imagination meet that something extraordinary happens. Gymnasts also rely upon their ears. Our ears give us balance and location. The ability to perform depends on self-location in space.

My design practice focuses on self-location and materializing the invisible forces of our everyday experiences. I want people to see the work, watch the videos, hear the sounds and walk through my installations. How does one describe the sensory? The senses are so personal. I have no idea what it is like to see through another person’s pupils. I think you’ll get a better sense of my work through the thesis book’s accompanying playlist. Listen, look and feel your way through this book. The split top and bottom allow you to choose how you read it. After all, this is all about your experience.

## Signal, Silence and Noise

I’m sitting at a bar table, across from two girlfriends. It’s one of those large trendy tables that is far too wide to comfortably chat, so we gather around the end and I take the corner. The lighting is low, music plays slightly too aggressively in the background, and strangers walk by to approach the bar. I strain to hear my friends, distracted by a too-close bystander and the overlapping of voices. I speak up to be heard, almost yelling. Feeling a lingering sense of stress, I excuse myself to step outside. The snow falls delicately, dampening the streets in a twinkly bath. I breathe out in a long, smooth sigh.

Signal is the sound that someone distinguishes from the rest. It’s that important tidbit dancing across the soundscape that makes its way through the background noise—but only if given proper attention. The signal that I’m seeking in the bar is the conversation among my friends. The noise is everything else—the music, the rustling of bodies, the conversations I don’t care to hear. Noise roars its head in competition. I try to focus.

Hearing does not come naturally to me. I have always struggled to pick up signals with my bare ears and discern them from background noise. My mother is eighty percent deaf. She has a hearing imbalance which is far more severe, but similar to mine. This makes it difficult to locate sounds within our surroundings. And yet I have a fascination with various modes of communication, particularly in the absence or presence of sound. Plenty of others have built careers on sound perception when they themselves dealt closely with hearing loss: the better-known ones include Beethoven (deaf); Thomas Edison (deaf in one ear) and Alexander Graham Bell (mother and wife both deaf). Maybe it’s in the absence of something that humans wish to gain understanding.

Signal and noise are dependent on one another—if everything is signal, and all else is silence, the result is a bombardment of noise. Nothing can be heard. What then, is silence? It might be described as soundlessness. A lack of audio. But humans are forever beholden to audio, even in the most soundproof anechoic chamber on Earth. We cannot escape our own sounds—a quiet breath, the tapping of eyelashes, blood pumping through the veins, the white noise reverberating in the innermost tunnels of the ears. The auditory spectrum for humans is limited. Extremely low frequencies are difficult to hear, yet they can be felt. And while we can't see sound in space, it has a physical quality materialized in waves that permeate human existence.

What if we referred to signal and noise in ways that weren't specific to sound? Signals could be defined as *foreground elements* that are *noticed* consciously.<sup>1</sup> These terms can apply to arenas of both auditory and visual significance. While graphic design traditionally refers to that which is visual, I believe it is more. Design can be used to create visceral, sensory experiences, as well as a sense of place and memory. The deep rousing phenomena of audio can heighten and enrich these experiences.

In his book *The New Analog*, Damon Krukowski describes listening to music as “part of an imagined space—a space not of the world but in our heads, conjured through the manipulation of our sense of location.”<sup>2</sup> We use our ears to locate ourselves, and to find our balance. In the past, we listened to orators, camp fire stories and the radio, creating our own imagined spaces. Now we listen to podcasts and audiobooks, often through headphones that can isolate us in any space we take them.

1

Raymond Murray Schafer, founder of The World Soundscape Project defines signals as “foreground sounds and they are listened to consciously...they are the figure rather than the ground.”

“The Soundscape.” *The Tuning of the World*, by Raymond Murray Schafer, 1999.

2

Damon Krukowski, *The New Analog: Listening and Reconnecting in a Digital World*. London: MIT Press, 2018.

Can listening be reading? Graphic design traditionally guides the reading experience. Every design student learns how to set type, lay out spreads, and sequence pages. But can't the reading experience include sound? It already does, even in a book format—while we sit and read, we still hear the sounds of our environment. I think of the book as a key object in graphic design making. But if humans are reading in a multitude of ways, then I believe designers should design in a multitude of ways. That means using all the tools at our disposal to inspire and provoke people.

Sound sways like an ocean, it roars with furious noise and gently calms to a dull murmur. It is a palette that can calm your nerves or drive you mad.

My work harnesses the phenomena of sound as an expansive approach to graphic design. It distills and elevates natural and mediated sound to create an exchange with those that experience it. It teases apart the subjectivity of sensorial perception, and challenges people to listen more closely to the everyday sounds that elevate the human experience. BAM!

## Signal

conscious attention

## Atmosphere

everything from silence to noise

# Transpouse

Signal

noticed consciously

Atmosphere

everything from silence to noise

## Skype + Skate

Video call game, documented as film

Video duration: 40 seconds

The use of roller skates brings an element of absurdity and play to the conversation, and allows for smooth transitions across space and screens.



## Transpositions in Space

### Space

An area or expanse which exists in three dimensions, although modern physicists usually consider it to be part of a boundless four-dimensional continuous sequence with time known as spacetime.

### Transpose

To transfer or switch to another position or place. An exchange or transfer.

Here comes another graphic designer talking about space. It comes with the territory. Anything visual needs a space to inhabit. From the beginning of our studies, designers learn about “white space” on a page, and how important that is for establishing hierarchy. White space allows the eyes to rest, to narrow in on a point of focus. It is one of the structures that allows us to see.

When it comes to audio, space carries equal importance. Audio inhabits space. The qualities of that space determine how something sounds. Imagine a choir singing in a large cathedral with vaulted ceilings. Picture the sound reverberating in this large chamber. Now, move the choir somewhere else. The same people are packed in an elevator. How do their voices sound different?

Movement also requires a space. You move differently on an open ice rink than you do trudging through a dense forest.

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Video call game, documented as film

Video duration: 40 seconds

The use of roller skates brings an element of absurdity and play to the conversation, and allows for smooth transitions across space and screens.



Space is intimately bound up in time. In physics, spacetime blends together the three dimensions of space with the concept of time into a four-dimensional continuum. In his manifesto, sound and space artist Bernhard Leitner describes a different relationship between time and space: “It is space which has a beginning and an end. Space here is a sequence of spatial sensations—in its very essence an event of time. Space unfolds in time; it is developed, repeated and transformed in time.”<sup>1</sup>

Canadian artist Janet Cardiff creates installations and soundwalks with her partner George Bures Miller. Mirjam Schaub, author of *Janet Cardiff: The Walk Book*, says that she “separates time and space with both video and binaural recording in her walks and emphasizes that separation by re-introducing images and sounds into the field of vision and sound from which they were originally taken. It creates a powerful and disturbing effect



Participants become human columns in Leitner's 1971 piece, *Vertical Space 1*. The person stands on one drum, with the other suspended above the head. Speakers reside in both drums. The sound moves spatially through the body and reverberates through the feet.

1

Bernhard Leitner, “Sound Space Manifesto,” 1977.



In Janet Cardiff's 2004 soundwalk *Her Long Black Hair*, participants wander through Central Park with photographs that blend the past with the present, and fiction with reality.

2

Mirjam Schaub, *Janet Cardiff: The Walk Book*. Vienna: Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, in collaboration with Public Art Fund, New York, 2005. (114).

for the participant. The strange sensation felt in the midst of seemingly familiar surroundings is the result of the movements and sounds we and other people make."<sup>2</sup>

Artist Bruce Nauman leverages the senses in space to create meaning in his work. Robert Smithson describes Nauman's work in relation to space: "Natural space is not infinite. The surveyor imposes his artificial spaces on the landscape he is surveying, and in effect produces perspectival projects along the elevations he is mapping. In a very nonillusionistic sense he is constructing an illusion around himself because he is dealing directly with literal sense perceptions and turning them into mental conceptions."<sup>3</sup>

My work creates strange sensations in familiar surroundings. The majority of my work is time-based, so the spaces where the work lives form its very essence. Through the transposition of space,

## Skype + Skate

Video call game, documented as film  
Video duration: 40 seconds

The use of roller skates brings an element of absurdity and play to the conversation, and allows for smooth transitions across space and screens.



I re-orient the viewer or participant from the expected to something slightly amiss. The new space may still feel somewhat familiar and mundane, but it is out of context. Transposing spaces causes a break in perspective, which opens the possibility to form new perspectives.

I relocate sounds, objects and bodies in spaces to unexpected places. An exchange forms as I move in and out of different mediums. For me, this often involves misusing tools. From iPhone keyboards to Skype, I subvert the intended function of a tool to place people in new, surreal spaces. This leaves room for us to more actively consider the physical and digital spaces we inhabit. It also leaves room to investigate meaning of concepts less tangible: escapism, language, essence. The following projects use transpositions in space to alter perspective. I hope that moving through this book-space does the same for you.



Bruce Nauman's seven-channel video, *Still from Contrapposto Studies, i through vii* (detail) challenges mental conceptions of the body's space. 2015/16.

3

Robert Smithson, "Pointless Vanishing Points," 1967, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Bruce Nauman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. (267).



**Reverb**

Short for reverberation, reverb refers to a buildup of reflections from an electronically-generated sound, that then decays into an echo effect.

**Skype + Skate**

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The use of roller skates brings an element of absurdity and play to the conversation, and allows for smooth transitions across space and screens.

**Skype + Skate**

Video call game, documented as film  
Video Duration: 40 seconds

Skype intends to connect people far away from each other—not those side-by-side. I was surprised by the way misusing Skype led to unintended experiences; sound reverb occurs when one caller sits too close to the other. *Skype + Skate* breaks and exposes the barriers of video calling, while crossing between digital and physical spaces.

Several students (Angela Torchio, Weixi Zeng, Goeun Park and Yoon Lee) sit around the graduate studio and connect through Skype

with me. I skate around the room. Passing by one of them indicates their turn to add to the conversation. This trigger forms an exquisite corpse dialogue, such that each speaker adds to the previous one. Eventually, the group speaks casually to one another—intrigued by my skating through Skype's interface—while ignoring the intended purpose of video calling. By introducing an element of absurdity, I broke the tool—leaving the room in human conversation.



Rolling by a participant indicates to that person to begin talking. With the devices so close, a high-pitched reverberation

distorts the sound quality and makes communication between screens difficult.



Screen captures from the experience reveal the strange spatial relationship of appearing to be in more than one place at a time.

## InterSpace

With Goeun Park

Performance, documented as video

Video Duration: 2 minutes 30 seconds

A collaboration between myself and Goeun Park, *InterSpace* is an exploration of space and sound interfaces. Gathering video from past archives, we loosely assemble footage in Adobe Premiere Pro. Two Zoom recorders capture and manipulate our voices reading the opening pages of Georges Perec's *Species of Spaces*.<sup>1</sup> Adobe Premiere Pro's

interface forms the stage for the story. The windows open and close to reveal layers of folders, footage and graphs. At times, Premiere transcribes a video's audio into an abstraction. The images translate the text into a personal narrative from both our pasts.

<sup>1</sup>

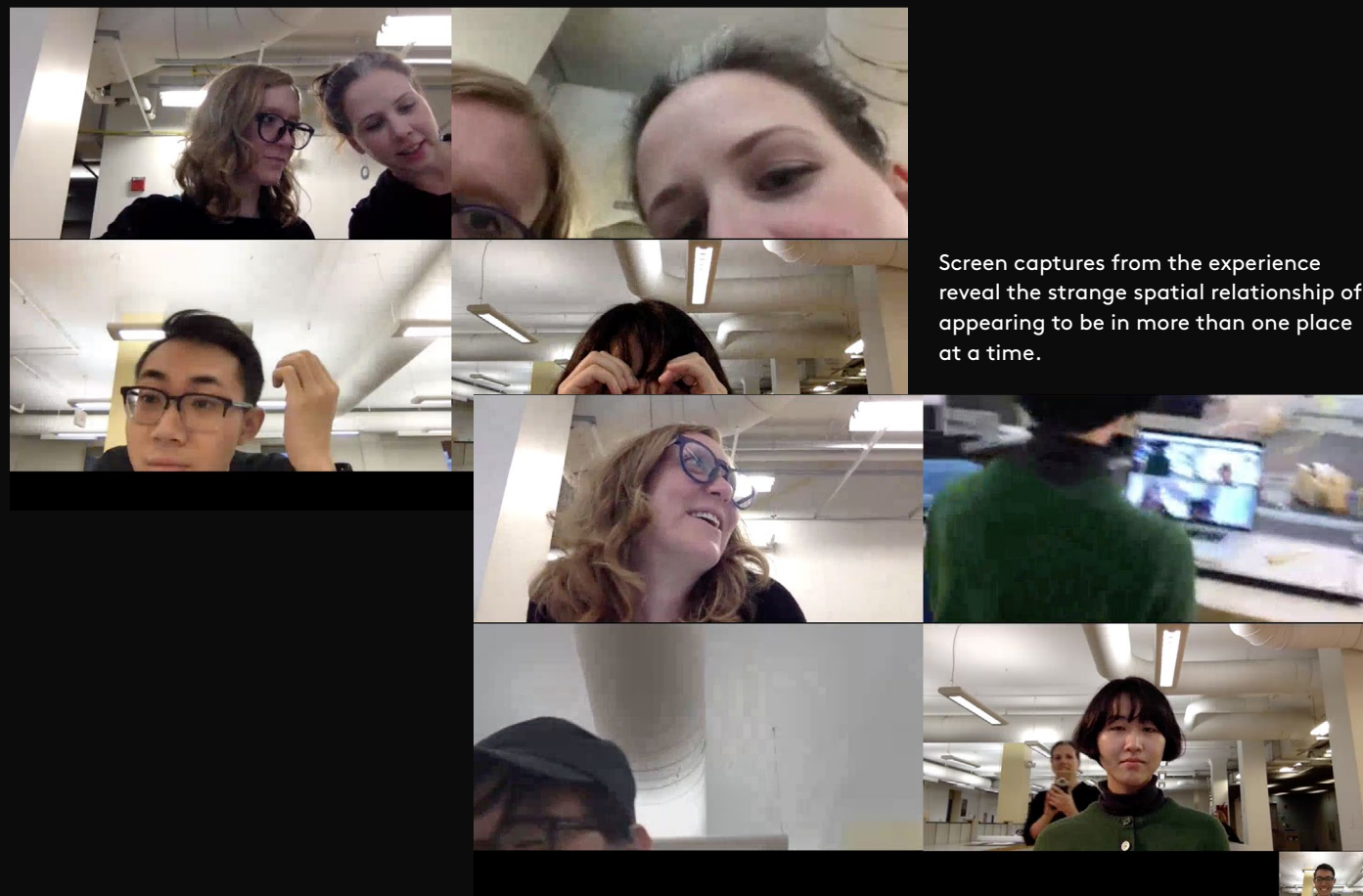
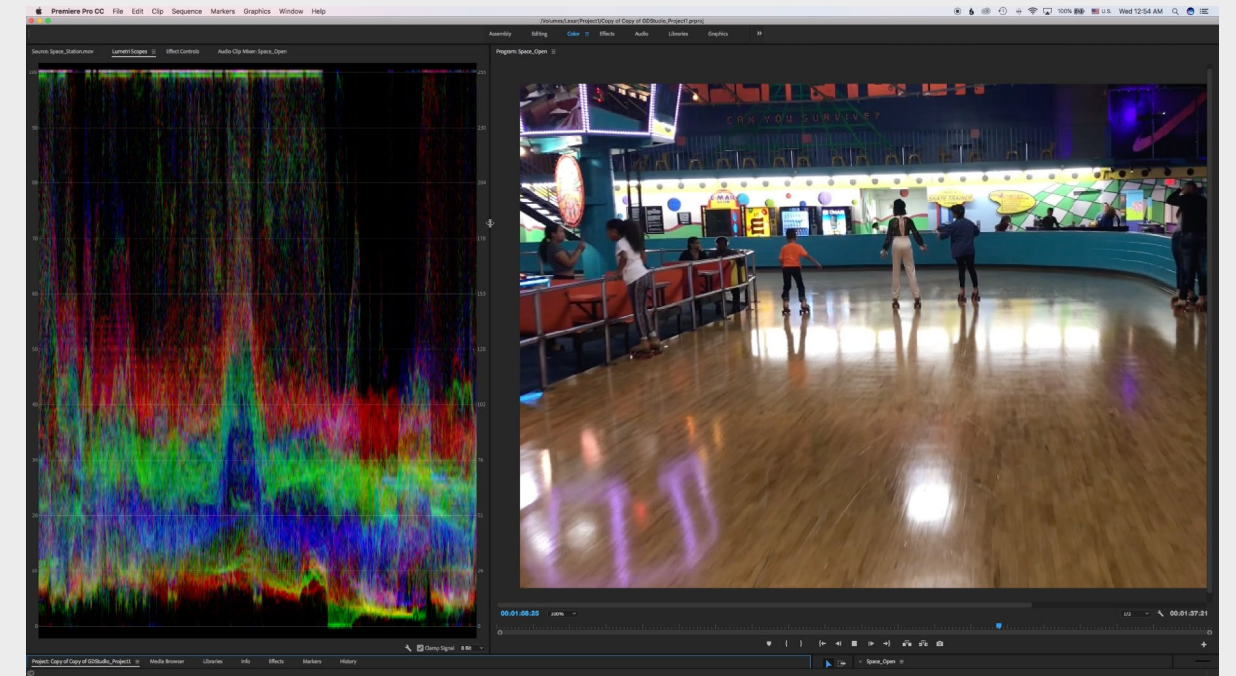
Perec, Georges, and John Sturrock. 1997. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. London, England: Penguin Books. (3-4).



## InterSpace

With Goeun Park  
 Performance, documented as video  
 Duration: 2 minutes 30 seconds

The obsession with roller skates began for me while filming the gliding circular path of a roller rink at a friend's birthday party. The footage makes its way into Premiere Pro—the film's interface. Lumetri scopes display color information in the left window.



Screen captures from the experience reveal the strange spatial relationship of appearing to be in more than one place at a time.

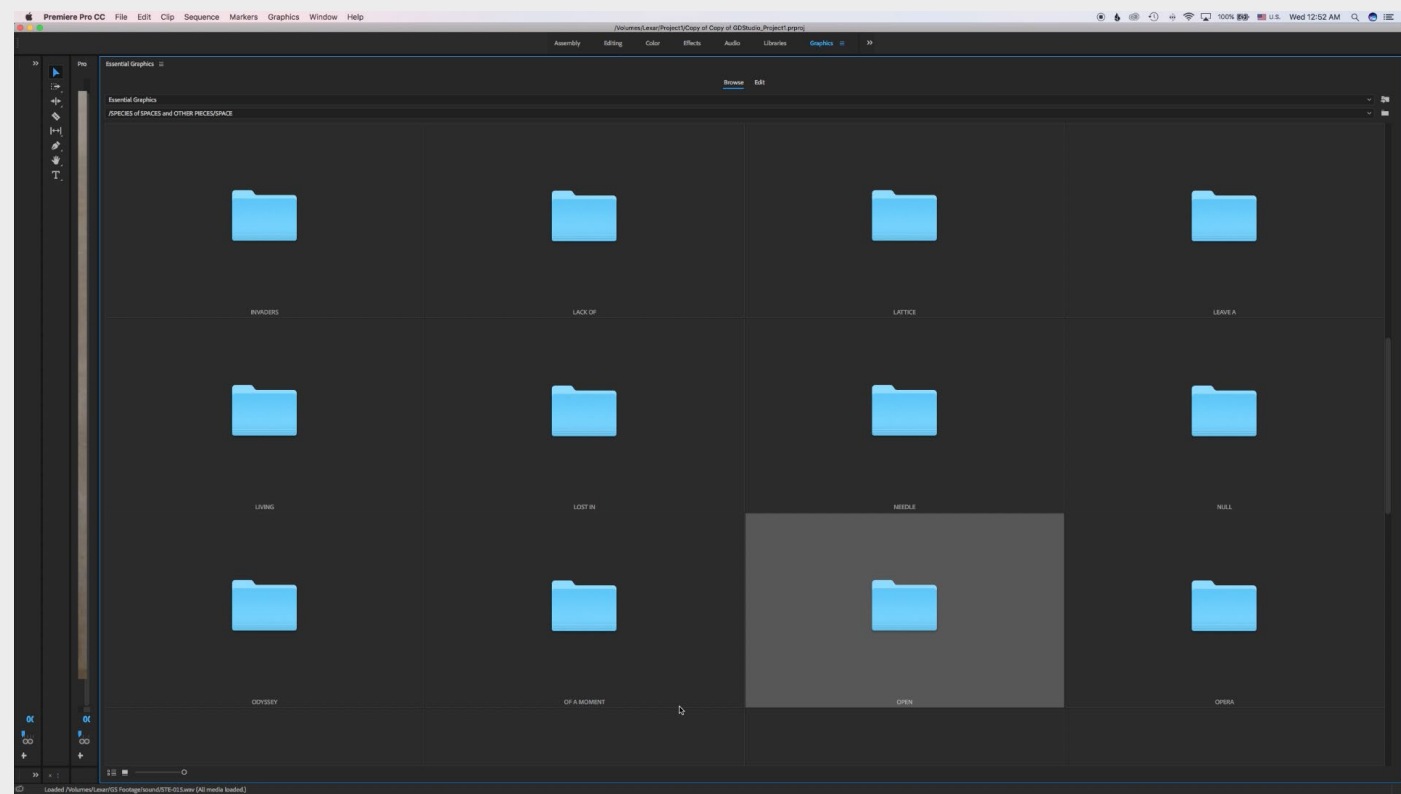
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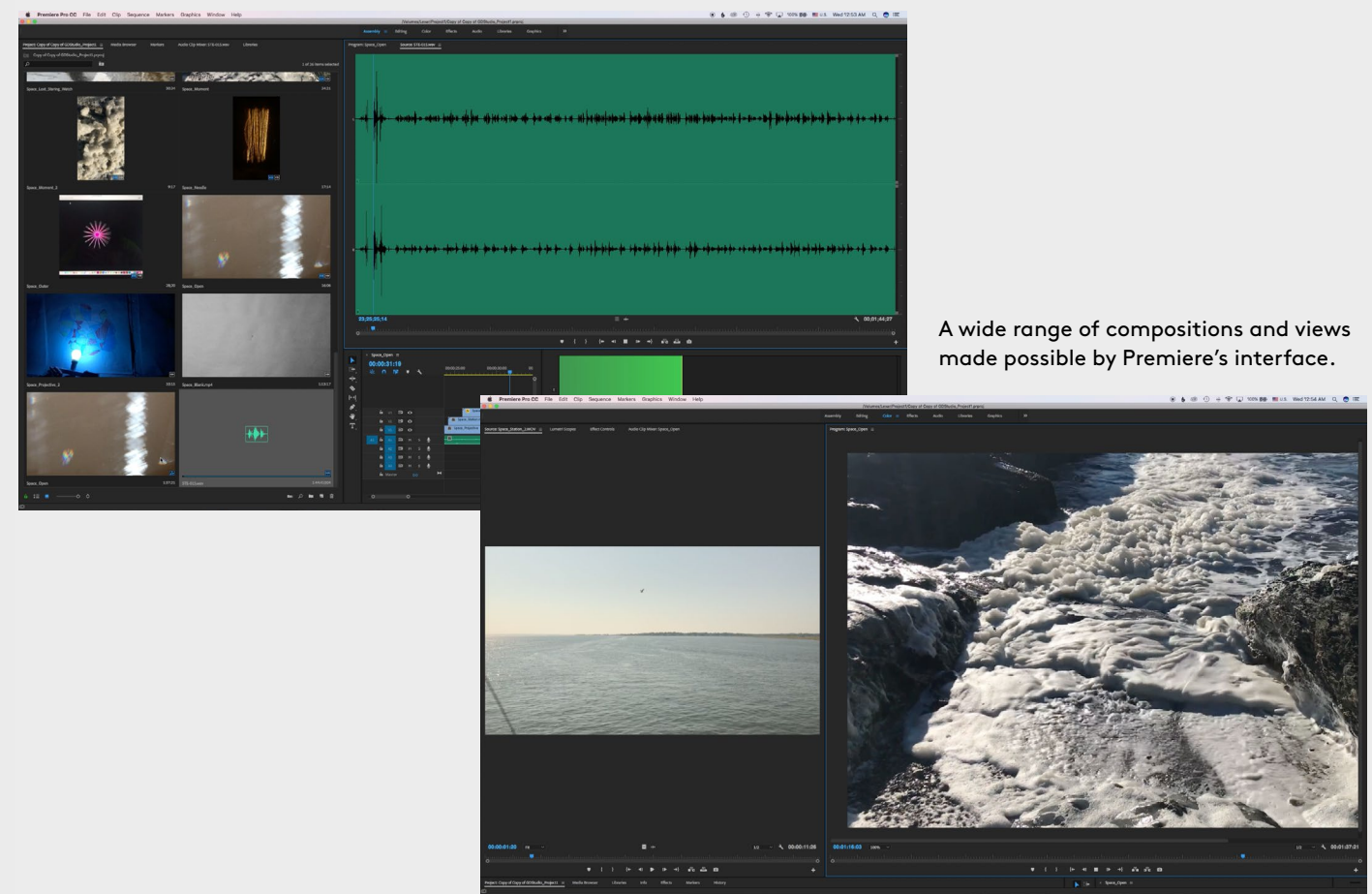
interface forms the stage for the story. The windows open and close to reveal layers of folders, footage and graphs. At times, Premiere transcribes a video's audio into an abstraction. The images translate the text into a personal narrative from both our pasts.

<sup>1</sup> Perec, Georges, and John Sturrock. 1997. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. London, England: Penguin Books. (3-4).



The folder structure in Premiere represents the categories from George Perec's opening pages of *Species of Spaces*.

Interspace



A wide range of compositions and views made possible by Premiere's interface.

TRANSPOSE 37

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The opening pages of Perec's *Species of Spaces*, the text that form the concept and audio for the video.

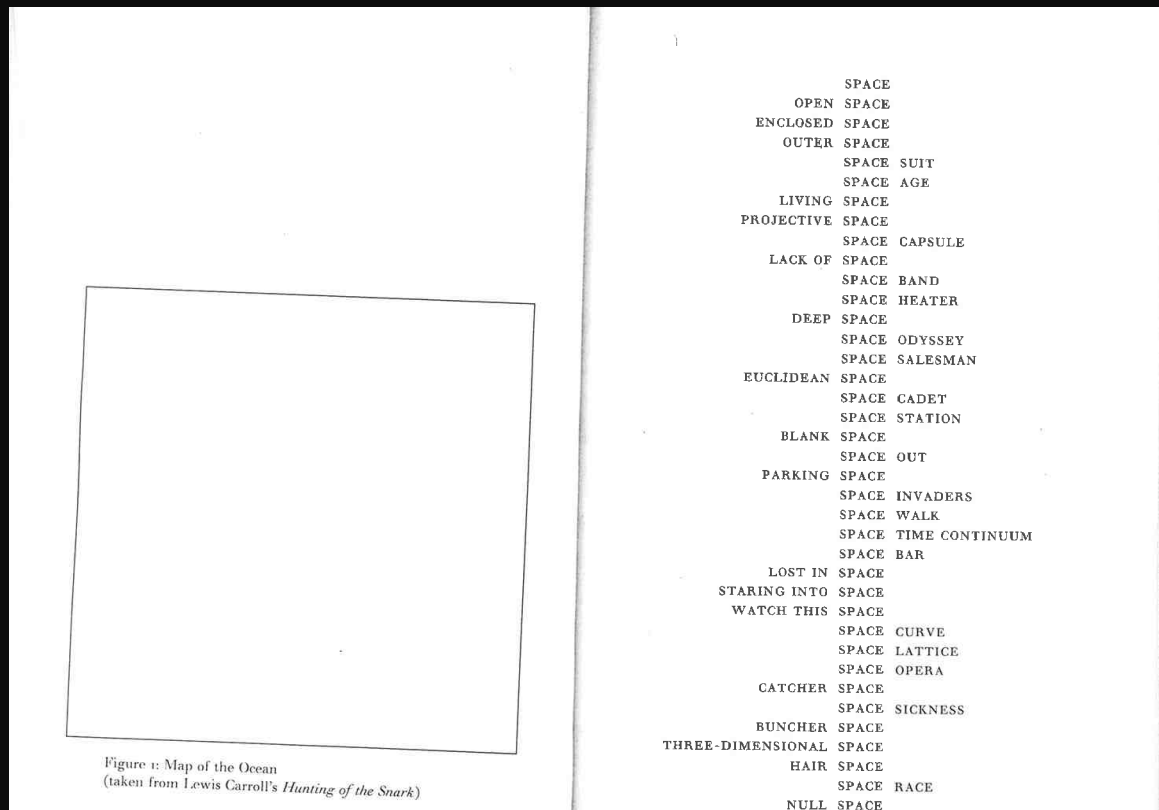


Figure 1: Map of the Ocean (taken from Lewis Carroll's *Hunting of the Snark*)

InterSpace

## Music Movement

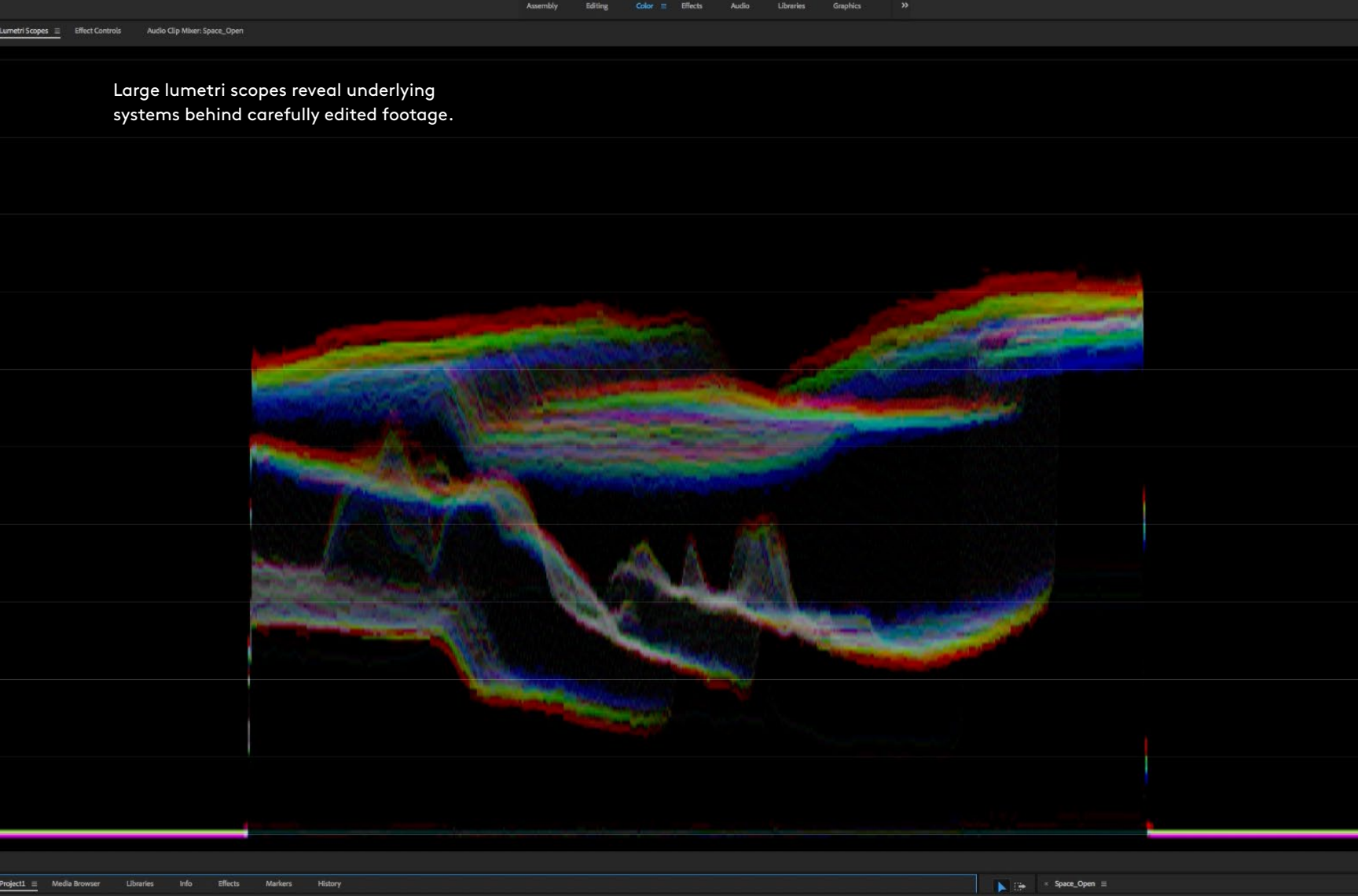
2 videos and poster  
Duration: 1 minute 16 seconds, and 3 minutes 11 seconds  
Violinist/Fiddle Player: Jennifer Kube

Using video and transcription through color coding, *Music Movement* explores the patterns that emerge between two different musical styles using the same instrument: the violin. This project stems from my fascination with the systems of language—musical/audio, written, spoken and visual. Music is unquestionably physical, powerfully human, and surprisingly mathematical. Yet the variations in music are difficult to articulate. As a designer and a recreational fiddle player, I find the relationship between bluegrass and classical violin particularly intriguing. Both use the same instrument, yet the language many professionals use to describe the difference between two genres is rather vague. Timing. Essence. Approach. I wanted to explore this area through visual language.

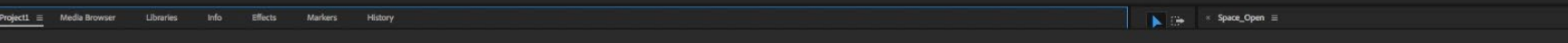
LED lights attached to the player's wrists, elbow and bow visually capture the movement. In the first video, the player performs the classical song, Vivaldi's *Concerto in G Major, Second Movement*, followed by the bluegrass tune *Jerusalem Ridge* (Bill Monroe's version). In the second video, both songs play side-by-side, without any audio, and text labels next to the lights identify the position on the body. Without the audio, you can focus purely on the visual movement of the lights and draw comparisons between the two styles.

I then transcribe both tunes using a colored block notation. Color hue corresponds to the note's pitch, as both are cyclical. The length of each block corresponds to the note's duration.

35

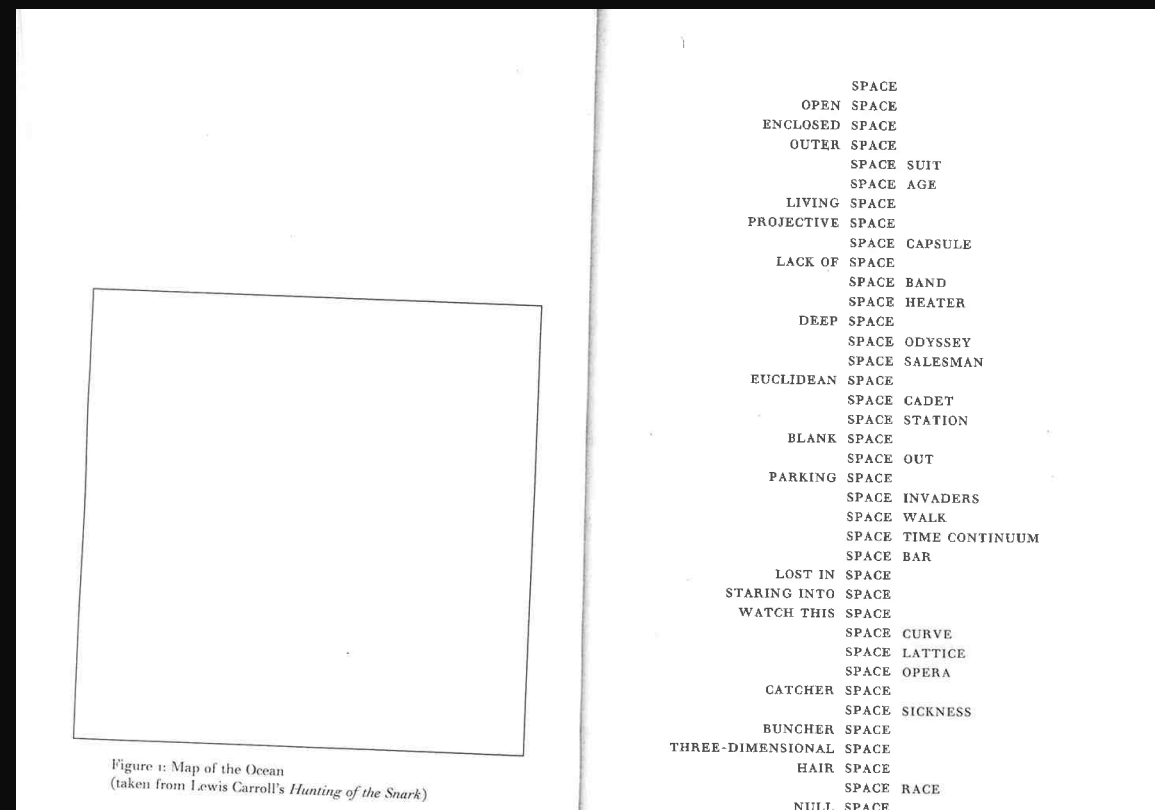


Large lumetri scopes reveal underlying systems behind carefully edited footage.



34

The opening pages of Pynchon's *Species of Spaces*, the text that form the concept and audio for the video.



## Music Movement

2 videos and poster

Duration: 1 minute 16 seconds, and 3 minutes 11 seconds

Violinist/Fiddle Player: Jennifer Kube

A long exposure shows the movement of LED lights attached to a violinist.

This project began as a personal study just before applying to grad school.



TRANSPOSE  
33

## Music Movement

2 videos and poster

Duration: 1 minute 16 seconds, and 3 minutes 11 seconds

Violinist/Fiddle Player: Jennifer Kube

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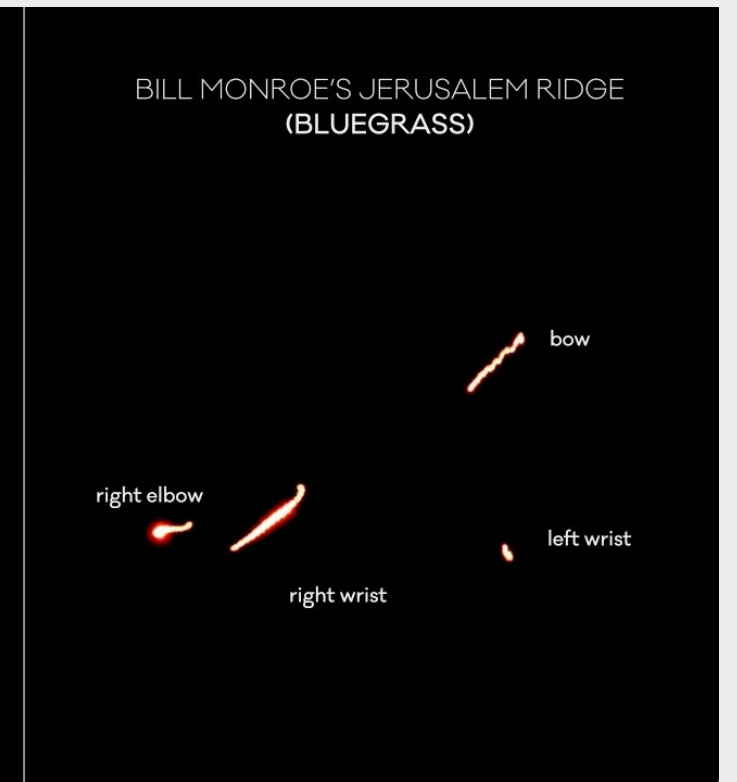
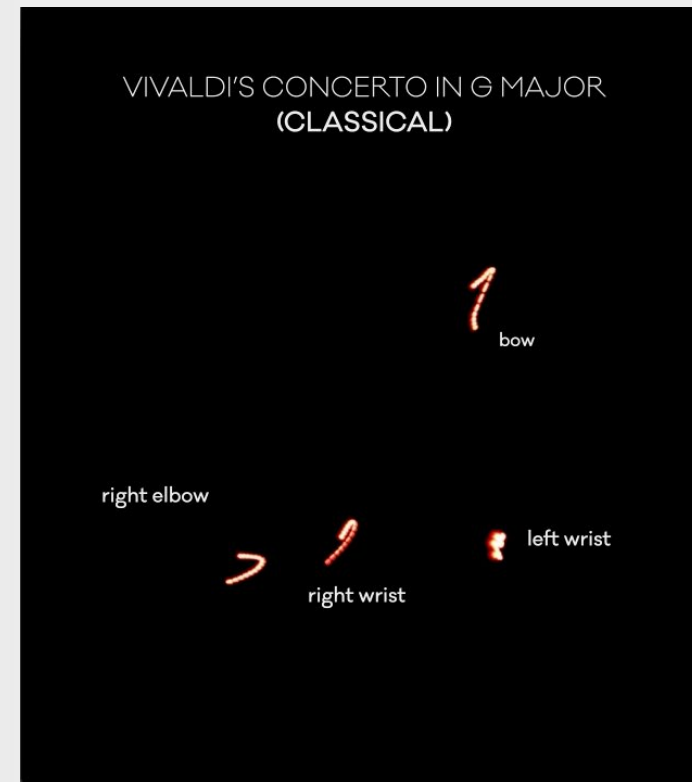
LED lights attached to the player's wrists, elbow and bow visually capture the movement. In the first video, the player performs the classical song, Vivaldi's *Concerto in G Major*, Second Movement, followed by the bluegrass tune *Jerusalem Ridge* (Bill Monroe's version). In the second video, both songs play side-by-side, without any audio, and text labels next to the lights identify the position on the body. Without the audio, you can focus purely on the visual movement of the lights and draw comparisons between the two styles.

I then transcribe both tunes using a colored block notation. Color hue corresponds to the note's pitch, as both are cyclical. The length of each block corresponds to the note's duration.

35



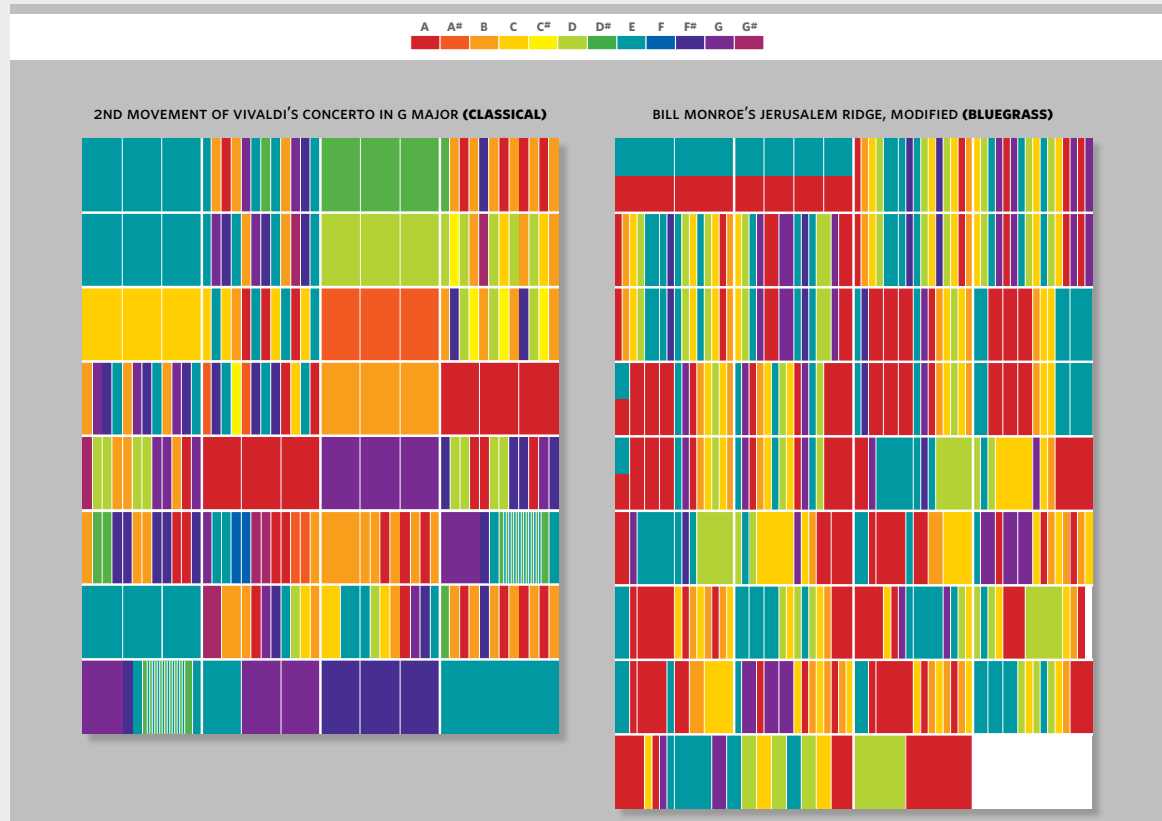
Classical movement, visualized and played with music.



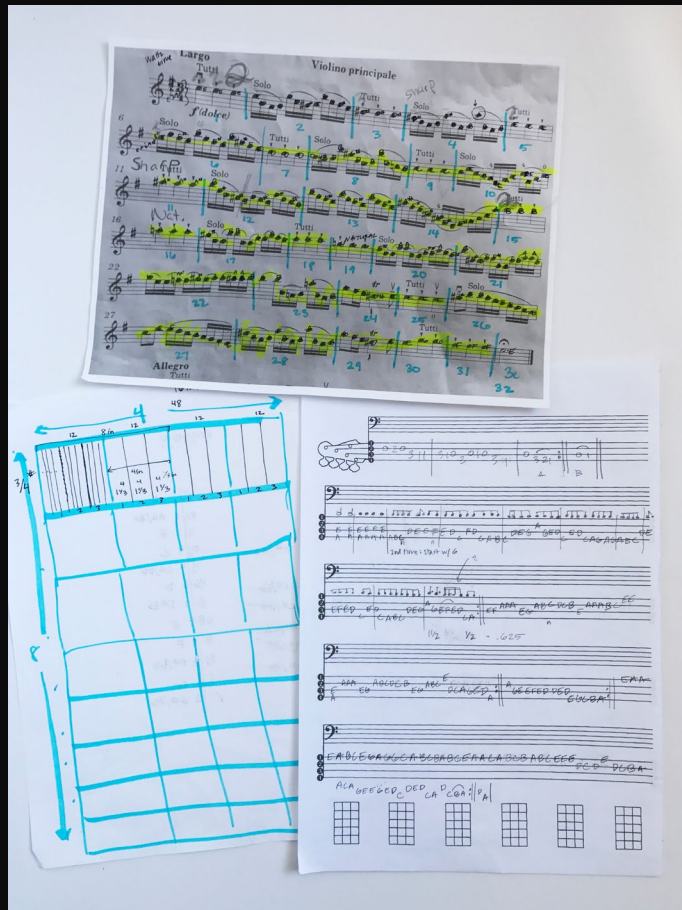
Side-by-side comparison of classical and bluegrass, without audio.



Lights attached to the musician's elbow, wrist and bow visually translated the music by movement. The difference in bridge curvature distinguishes the classical violin (left) from the fiddle (right). Some fiddle players choose to shave this part down to make blending strings easier.



In this transcription, color indicates the note played, and width of the color block indicates duration.

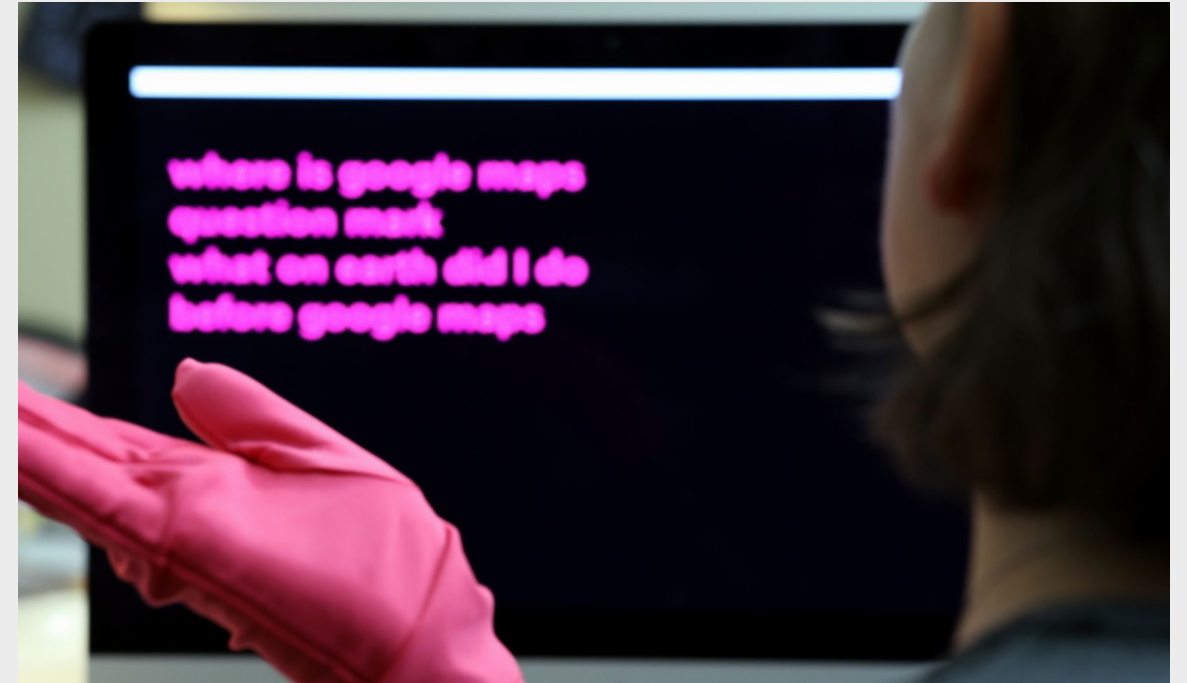


The process of transposing the two tunes to a notation system required a combination of careful listening, playing along and checking with sheet music.

# Transitory Tracking

Performance with website, using p5.js libraries

Conversational hand gestures add more than emphasis to the reading; the movement tracking determines the position and alignment of text on screen.



# Transitory Tracking

Performance with website, using p5.js libraries

Transitory Tracking is a website that translates movements and projections in physical space to the space on screen. Voice recognition translates speech to text. As you move your hand to the left or the right, the text (generated by your speech) aligns left or right, and moves from top to bottom. At times, this creates strange glitches in translation. The movement tracking follows a specified color, so the proper hue (in this case, magenta) must exist alongside the hand in some capacity, either by wearing gloves or by holding something pink.

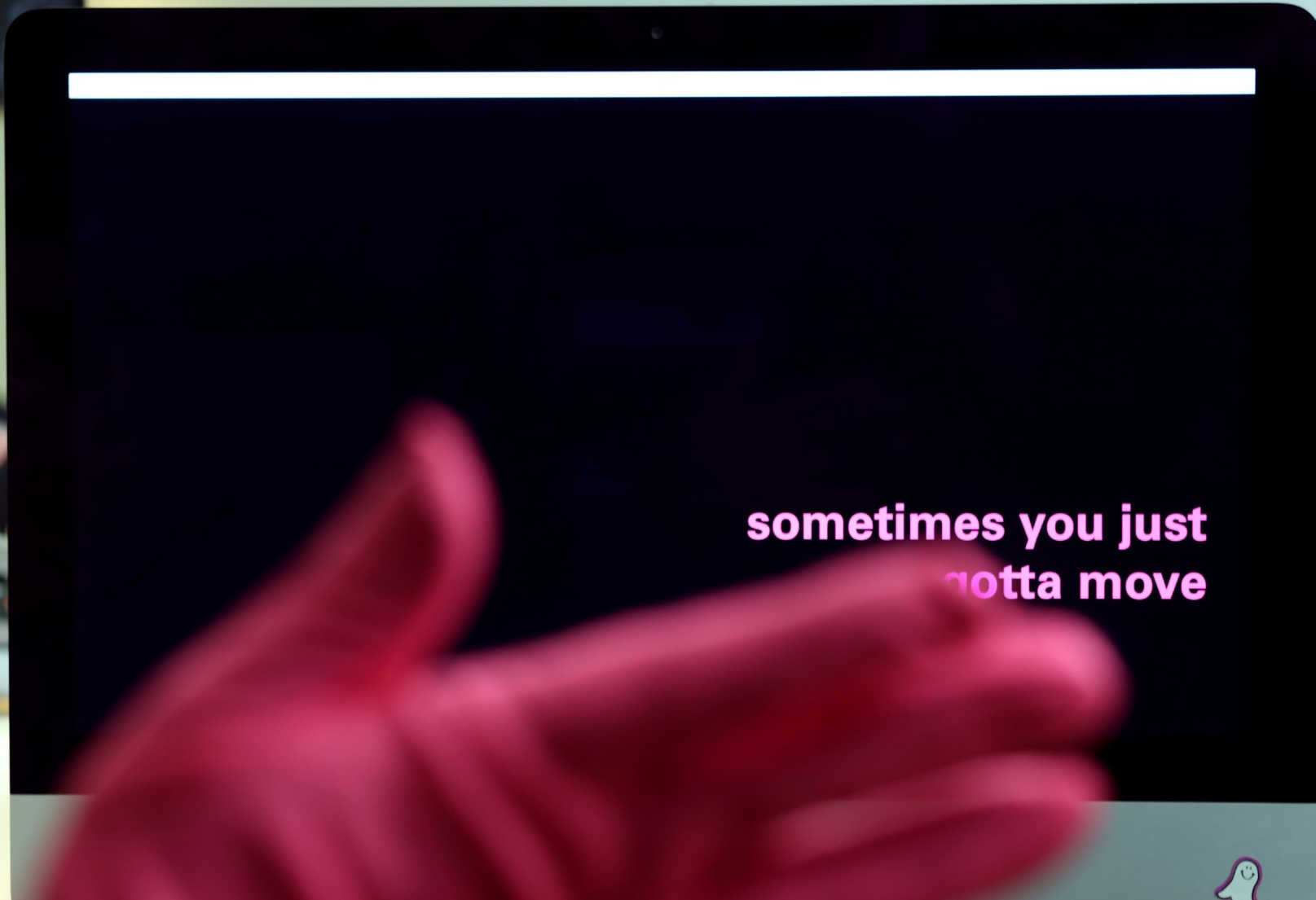
*I'm from Missouri  
Some call it misery  
flyover state  
Coast to coast  
with the cost  
I can't even fly over to my state.*

*Sometimes you just gotta move  
but where am I going?  
Get lost; I've landed somewhere else.  
Where's Google Maps? What on earth did I do before  
Google Maps?*

*Keep discovering. The ungraspable. But it's trackable.  
I want to capture it.  
The dynamics—movement. Gesture. Sound.*

In the performance, I recite a poem with the theme of transitory tracking, which marks my initial point of inquiry during the thesis process.

*All these people, inserting their opinions,  
left and right  
we're always right  
maybe it's time I insert my opinions.  
Fuck self-censorship. Question mark?*



**Transitory**

Occurring only for a short time. Fleeting. Ephemeral.

**Track**

To follow the course or trail of someone or something, typically in order to find them or note their data, such as location, at various points. To log a path or trajectory.



Studio website for NJ(L.A.), a California-based design consultancy founded by Nicole Jacek. Cross-hairs follow the visitor's mouse as it moves across the page, while the typographic

block in the center of the page moves back in space. The unexpected interactivity engages the visitor; it feels wacky and exciting.

**Inspiration**

A sound installation in Lincoln Woods State Park, *Listen This Way* questions the meaning and experience of escapism. Humans may wander through the woods to escape screen glare and a barrage of emails. But we also compulsively turn to our mobile companions to consciously (or unconsciously) escape the present.

Across from a parking lot, you can spot a strange light source. Walking closer, you see that two signs made out of LED lights spell "listen" and "this way." You are intrigued. You walk further. Various speakers hidden along a trail play recordings of digital technologies. Walking along the path, you can hear the clicking of an iPhone keyboard, the buzzing hum of an LCD screen, the scuttling sound of a scrolling mouse. In some places, these sounds collide and overlap. The sound sources become ambiguous as they mix with and replace the sounds of natural wildlife. Is it a woodpecker or something else, something that doesn't quite belong?

A visible acrylic sign accompanies each speaker. Upon closer inspection, you can see that these signs identify the sound source and provide a URL to a website. This website provides a digital experience of the installation, where you have to hover over spots on screen to reveal the sound source, and then click to play. A documentation film tells the story of the installation from live action footage. There are then three different experiences for the same installation: one in physical space, one in interactive digital space, and one through video. Each has different qualities and moods. The experience in the woods is adventuresome—quirky. The online experience is a translation of discovery. The film is quieter and more reflective. The project weaves in and out of physical and digital spaces to underline the impact of technology in our daily lives. It asks us to become more aware of our surroundings and the sensory experiences that make up the world we encounter.



## Inspiration

Website for Math Practice, a design and research studio founded by E. Roon Kang. The column width of the text block changes depending on the position of the mouse. I worked with Roon during the Visiting Designers workshop series in the spring of 2018. It was during that weekend I developed the initial idea for *Transitory Tracking*.



## Transitory

Occurring only for a short time. Fleeting. Ephemeral.

## Track

To follow the course or trail of someone or something, typically in order to find them or note their data, such as location, at various points. To log a path or trajectory.

## Listen This Way

Installation using LED lights, six battery-operated speakers and UV-printed clear acrylic  
Video Duration: 1 minute 37 seconds  
Website

LED lights spell out “listen” and “this way” to entice participants to walk along the trail. The signage hangs within viewing distance of a nearby parking lot at Lincoln Woods State Park.



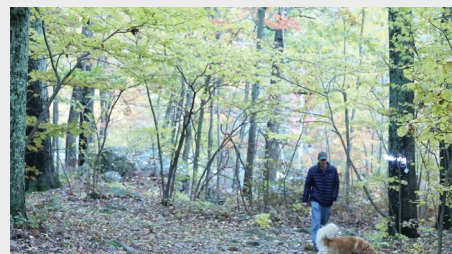
A sound installation in Lincoln Woods State Park, *Listen This Way* questions the meaning and experience of escapism. Humans may wander through the woods to escape screen glare and a barrage of emails. But we also compulsively turn to our mobile companions to consciously (or unconsciously) escape the present.

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00:01



00:08



00:11



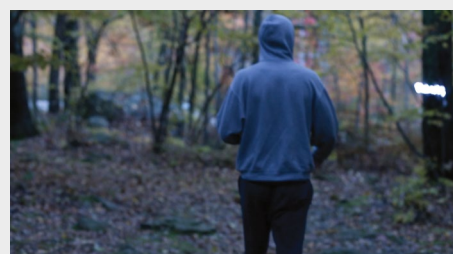
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00:25



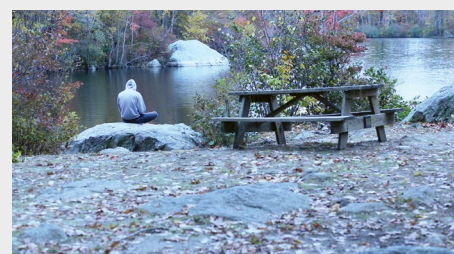
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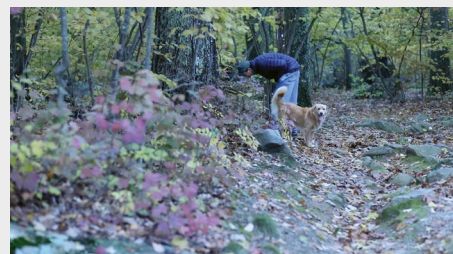
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00:44



01:00



01:02



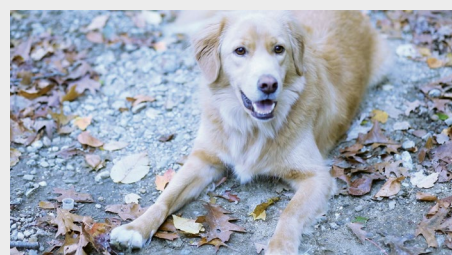
01:20



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01:28



01:33



01:38

A young man came along the path to read by the water. We spoke about the inner conflict between seeking nature to escape the everyday grind and the impulse to constantly stay digitally connected to the outside world.

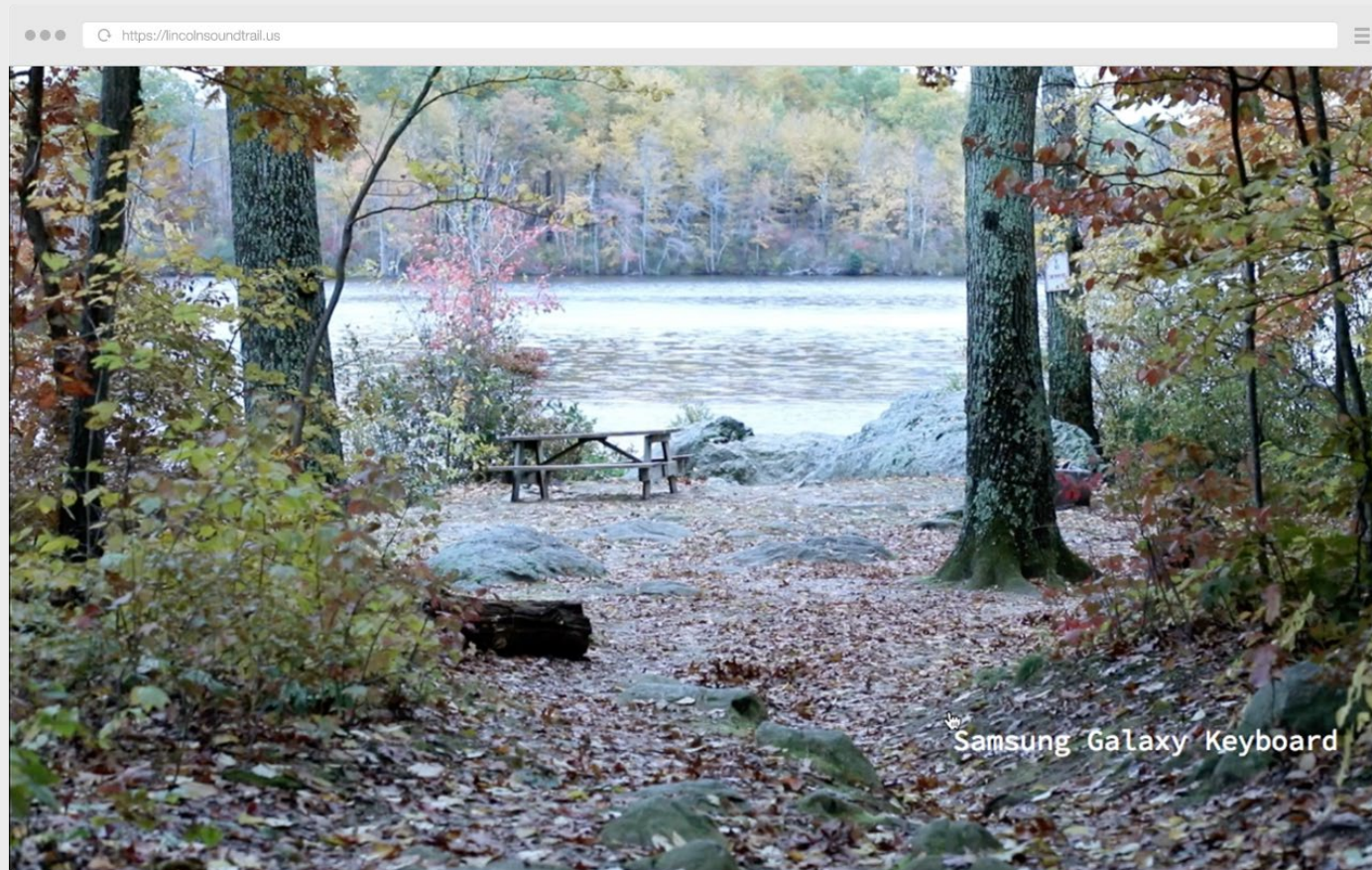
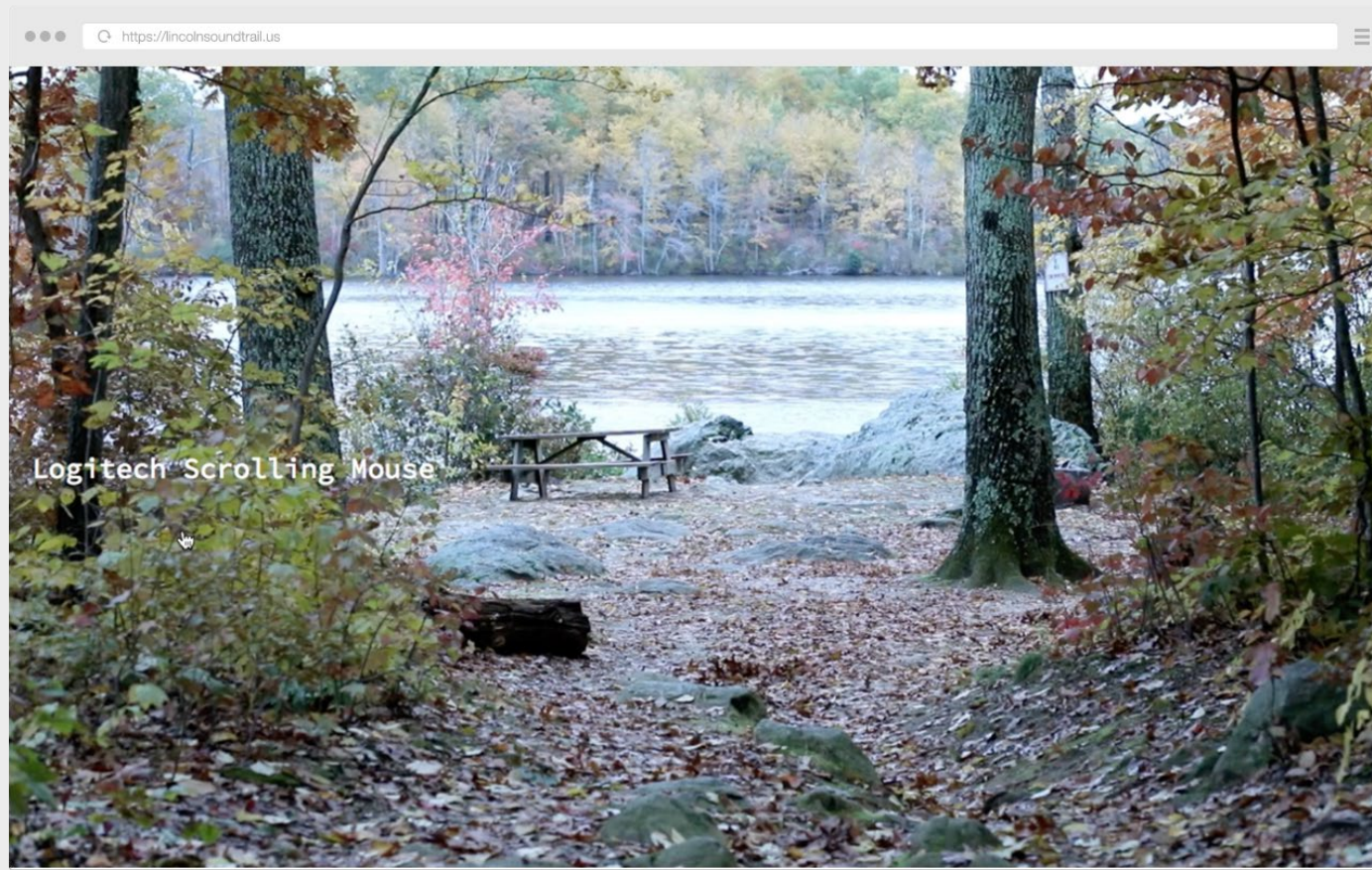
Other participants contemplate the signage and take snapshots with mobile devices, but ultimately sit in the space to have a face-to-face conversation.

Also pictured: Michael Auman and Angela Lorenzo.



UV-printed acrylic labels identify the sounds hidden nearby and prompt participants to seek the website online.





The website mimics the experience of the installation, with signage that reveals the sounds encountered when hovering over places on screen with the mouse.



*The Deep Dark*, by Caitlind R.C. Brown & Wayne Garrett, in the forest surrounding the Banff Centre, Canada, Sept. 7, 2015. Participants walk through illuminated doorways in the forest.

The installation reveals insights about the relationship between the natural environment and cultural constructs of darkness.

Inspiration



### Inspiration

*Please, Please, Pleased to Meet'cha* by Nina Katchadourian. A sound installation mounted in trees, with human voices mimicking bird songs. Wave Hill, the Bronx, 2006.

## Specimens

Overhead projections, documented with photography and website. UV-printed slides on acrylic box; microscopic photography.

Scientific yet dream-like imagery made from vibrant colored acrylic and overhead projections of specimens from the RISD Nature Lab



## Projection

### Projection

The display of an image on a surface using light, such as a movie screen or the output from a projector. It may also refer to the delivery of sound from a body or a speaker, i.e., "She projected her voice when on stage."

### Time

A period of duration which occurs in the past, present or future.



### Inspiration

*Please, Please, Pleased to Meet'cha* by Nina Katchadourian. A sound installation mounted in trees, with human voices

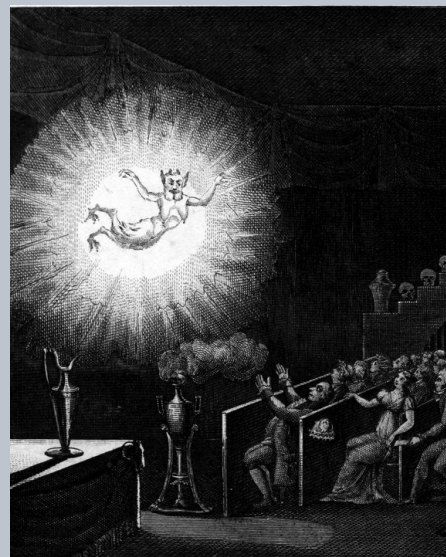


Illustration of Robert's phantasmagoria at the Cour des Capucines in 1797

What is projection? Machines called *projectors* come to mind. What we understand as light projection began as a stage illusion, known as phantasmagoria. In France, physics teacher Etienne-Gaspard took the stage name Robertson and created horror theater using magic lanterns. The apparatus was concealed from the audience, and the optic results terrified Parisians at the end of the 18th century.

Projection is an action of throwing something forward. It's a pushing out into space, and it occurs in real time. It makes me think of broadcasting. The projection or broadcast takes form in one space and pushes into another. The newscaster relays their experience from a specific place, but it reaches people in their different environments over the radio or news channel. This translation changes the story. Although projection is time-based, it can also capture pre-recorded experiences and transpose those experiences in time to another space.

## Specimens

Overhead projections, documented with photography and website. UV-printed slides on acrylic box; microscopic photography.

Scientific yet dream-like imagery made from vibrant colored acrylic and overhead projections of specimens from the RISD Nature Lab



Light and sound are waves thrown through space. These physical phenomena become intangible when we experience them. They cannot be held or touched. "Spectacle and geometry," says cinematographic culture scholar Dominique Païni, are "fields of activity far from each other." Yet in the world of film, they are mixed together, "a volume transferred to a surface, illusion and geometric codification, mirage and science."<sup>1</sup> Wonder emerges from science as imagination. From a psychological standpoint, projection occurs when someone inserts their own personal feelings onto another. The transfer is internal. The release of light, sound and internal thoughts in the form of projection allows me to create emotive and sensory experiences.

<sup>1</sup>

Tom Gunning, "The Long and Short of It: Centuries of Projecting Shadows, from Natural Magic to the Avant-garde," in *Art of Projection*, edited by Stan Douglas and Christopher Eamon. Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009. (24).



### Inspiration

*Please, Please, Pleased to Meet'cha* by Nina Katchadourian. A sound installation mounted in trees, with human voices

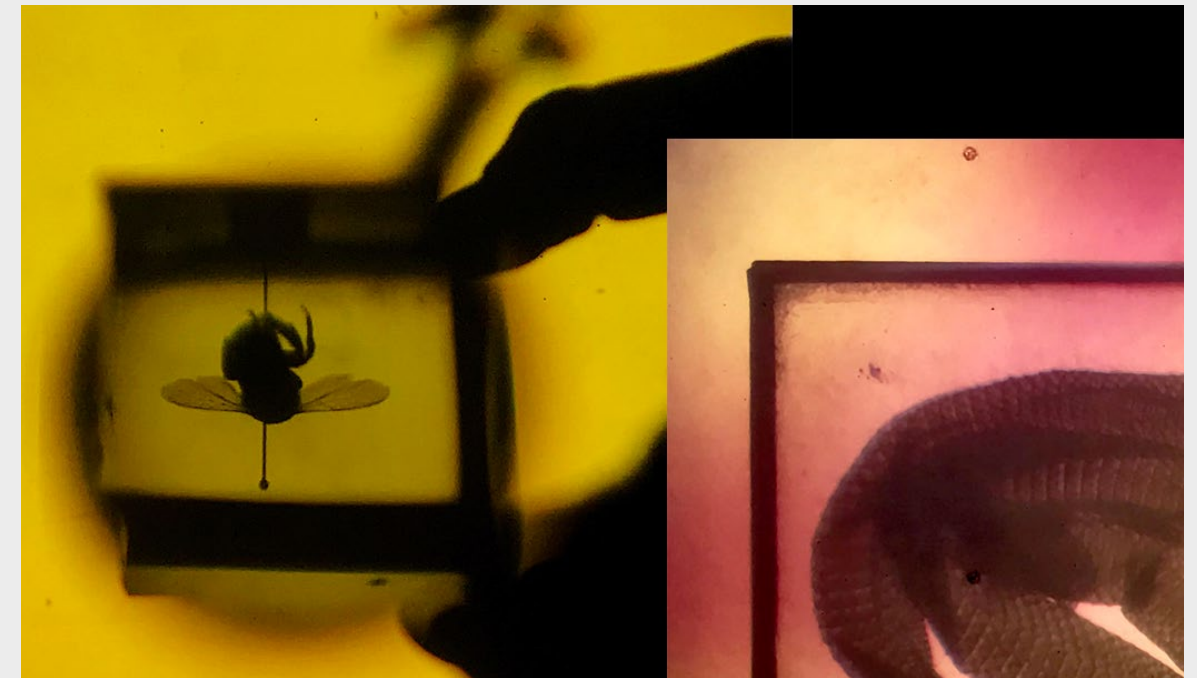
“Every experience is a paradox in that it means to be absolute, and yet is relative; in that it somehow always goes beyond itself and yet never escapes itself.”

—T.S. ELIOT

## Specimens

Overhead projections, documented with photography and website. UV-printed slides on acrylic box; microscopic photography.

Scientific yet dream-like imagery made from vibrant colored acrylic and overhead projections of specimens from the RISD Nature Lab



## Specimens

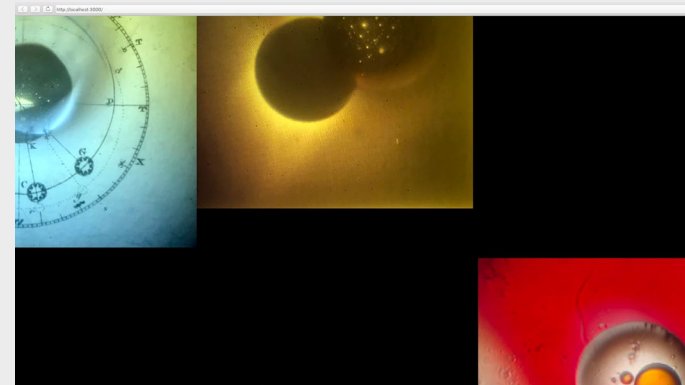
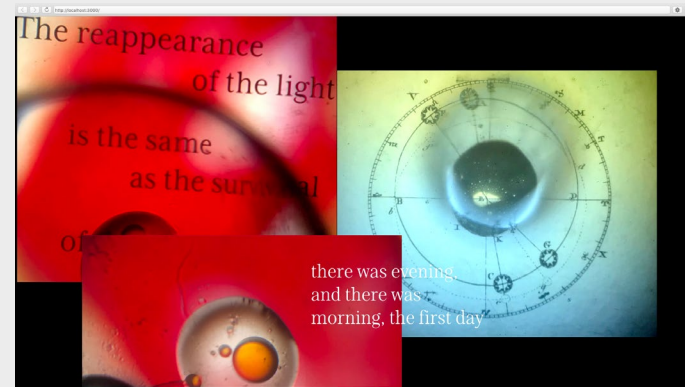
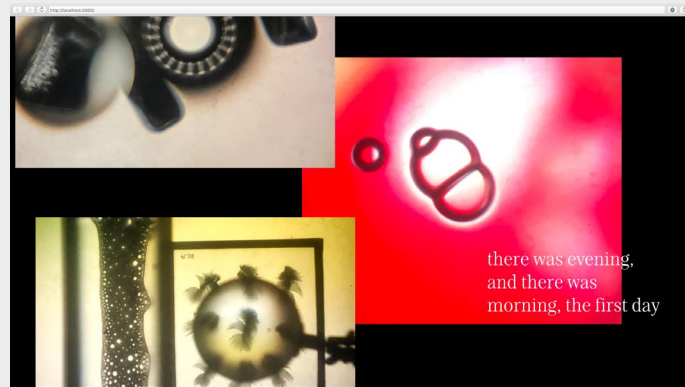
Overhead projections, documented with photography and website. UV-printed slides set in acrylic box; microscopic photography.

*Specimens* is a collection of images made from overhead projections of species from the RISD Nature Lab, various liquid formations, typography and semi-transparent multimedia. It materializes as both an interactive website and a physical display box containing scientific slides.

On the website, the main text that follows the cursor reads, “And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.” This comes from the Biblical book of Genesis, describing God’s creation of the universe. Images crawl onto the screen and overlap each other over time. Clicking the mouse reveals another set of images that interact with one another. Some of the images contain bits of text from a Victor Hugo quote, which in its entirety reads: “Nations, like stars, are entitled

to eclipse. All is well, provided the light returns and the eclipse does not become endless night. Dawn and resurrection are synonymous. The reappearance of the light is the same as the survival of the soul.”

Images translate across a series of relocations to raise questions about creation, manipulation and belief. They may appear at first glance to be scientific microscopic imagery, when in fact they are photographs capturing the physical properties of matter interacting with light. While the online collection of images is viewable anywhere on the web, the next iteration of the project becomes site-specific. It reinserts the project back into the RISD Nature Lab. UV-printed onto microscopic slides, tiny versions make a nod



The images on the website move at different rates across the screen, allowing for a variety of compositions. Clicking the mouse changes the images.

50

Specimens

54

to scientific observation. This creates an illusion of fact. Looking at the slides under a microscope reveals the truth behind the image—realized with multicolored ink globules. The lens of the artist, creator (divine or otherwise) and scientific theory blurs together—both in conflict and in harmony.

Specimens



Reduced projections UV-printed on microscopic slides, fitted into a pristine white box. While the slide medium conjures scientific associations, the source of the images remains a mystery.

TRANSPOSE 51

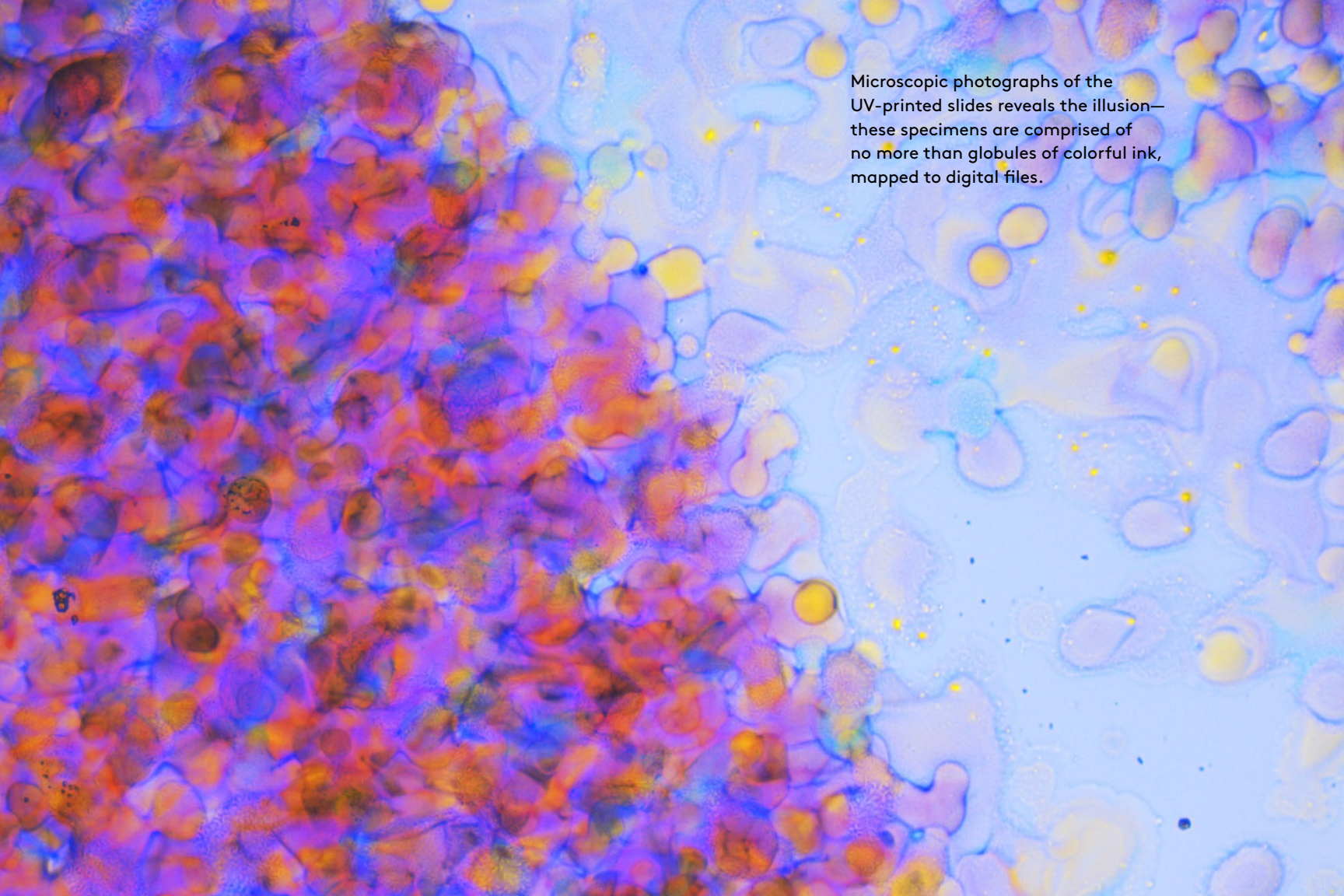


A bumblebee and a snakeskin from the RISD Nature Lab, later used with the overhead projector.

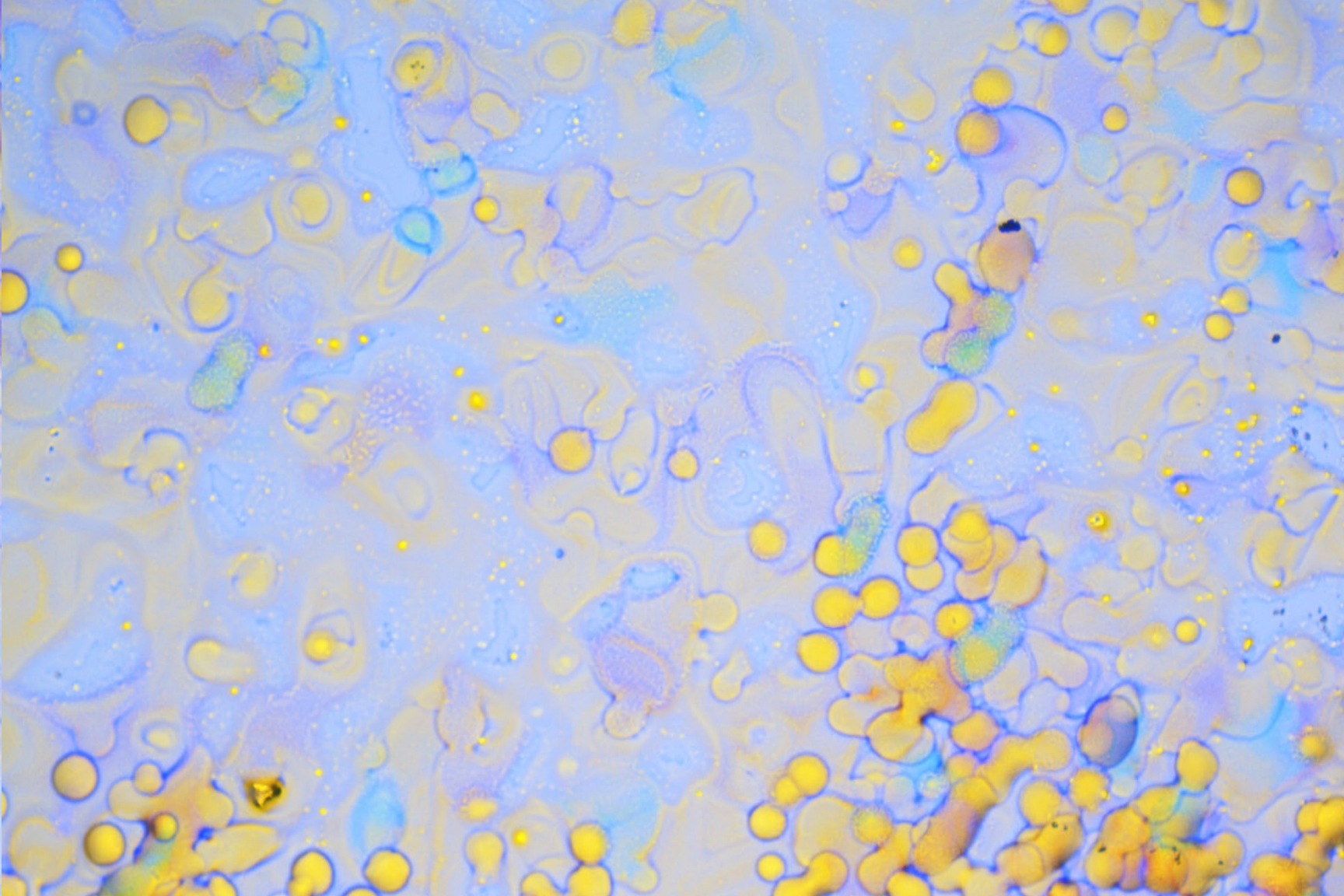


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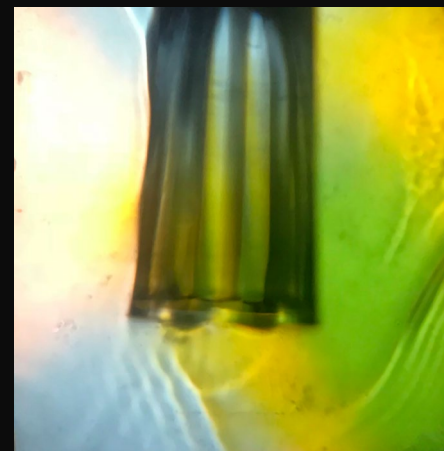




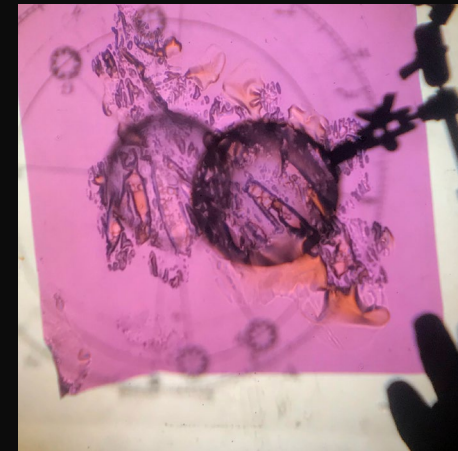
Microscopic photographs of the UV-printed slides reveals the illusion—these specimens are comprised of no more than globules of colorful ink, mapped to digital files.



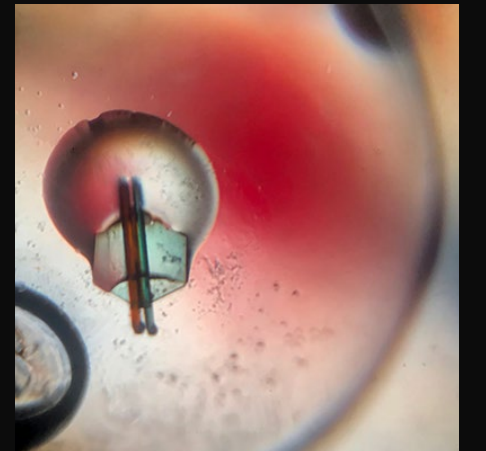
A jewelry microscope held above ice cubes, in a vessel with chili oil. Colored acrylic held below the projector's mirror creates the vibrant background.



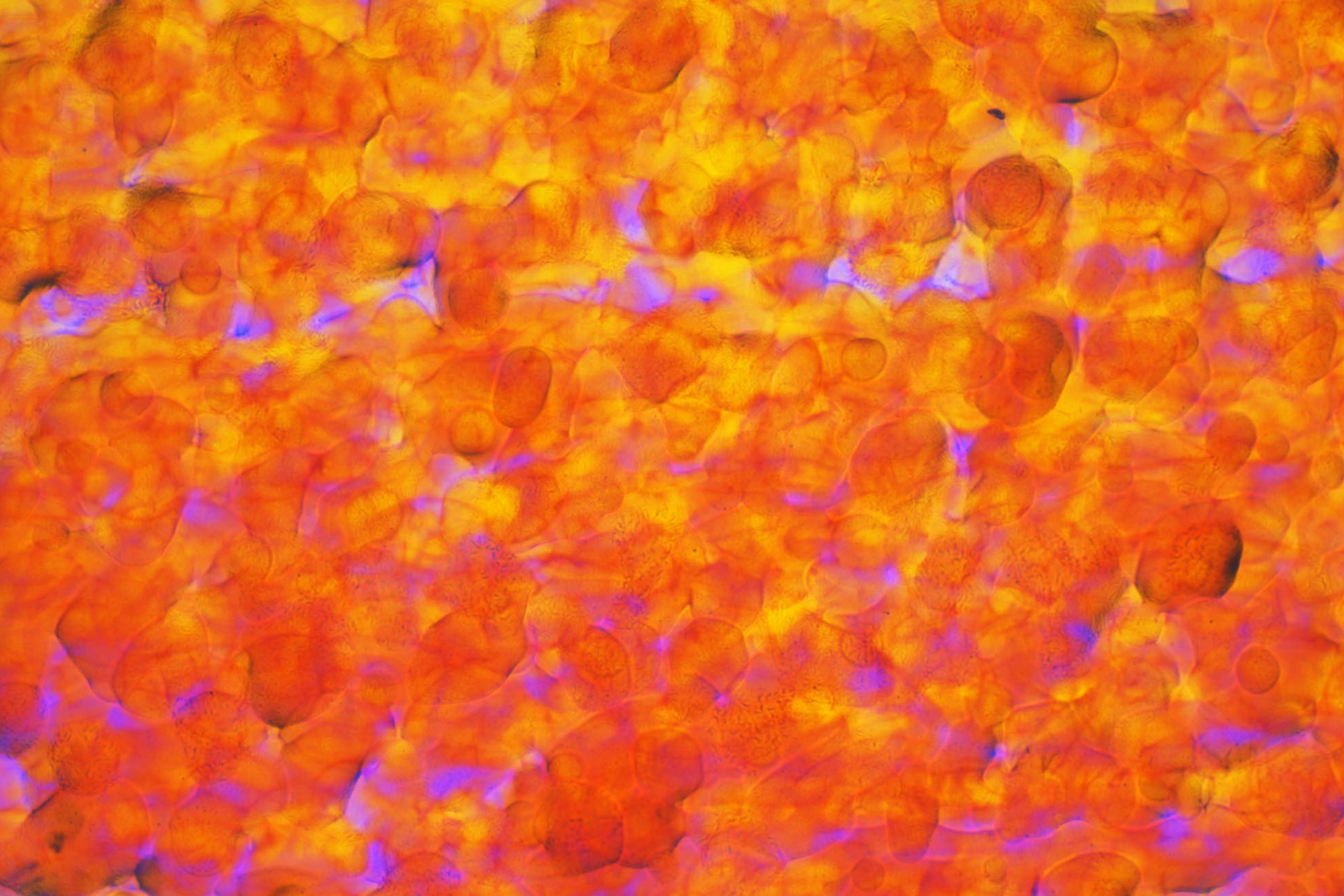
A drinking glass moving back and forth through water in a fish tank.



A printed transparency, purple cellophane with chili oil smeared on top and a jewelry microscope.



Water and oil in a rounded glass container with laser-cut acrylic shapes.



UV-printed glass slides viewed through a microscope in the RISD Nature Lab.



### Inspiration

Performance at Hilvaria Studios Hilvarenbeek, Netherlands, January 2008. Duo Moniek Smeets and Bram Wiersma use halogene light bulbs, a

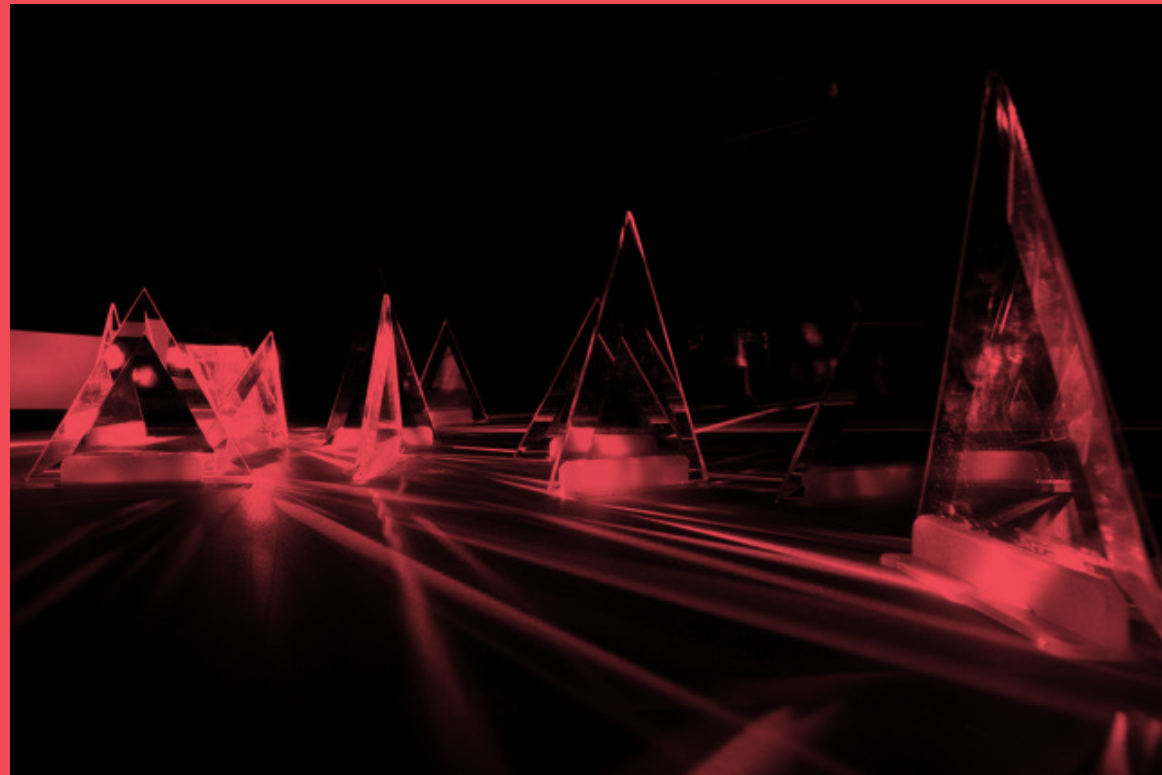
giant 1500W light bulb, led lights and 2 overhead projectors to display shadows of specimens in glass vessels. Music and sounds by Bram Wiersma.

## Eclipse: Abandon

Double-projector installation, with time lapse photography and live action footage, looped

The word “eclipse” comes from the Ancient Greek word *ekleipsis*, meaning abandonment. In English, “abandon” can mean to forsake something, but it can also mean to let go—to be spontaneous. For this projection project, I created a time lapse video of sunlight moving across a wall—which distorts as it filters through the windows of an abandoned school building. When you interact with the work by entering the space and blocking part of the

projection, the word “abandon” emerges from the shadow. The video of the three-dimensional typography reveals shadows that correspond with the movement of the sun projection. The blocking body or object acts as an eclipse. *Eclipse: Abandon* explores hiding and revealing, language interpretation and the overlapping and repositioning of space. The experience ranges from surprising to contemplative.



**Inspiration**

Ross Manning's *Sad Majick*, at the 2014 Dark Mofo Festival in Hobart, Tasmania. A colorful array dances across the floor,

made from the simple analog technique of refracting light through prisms.

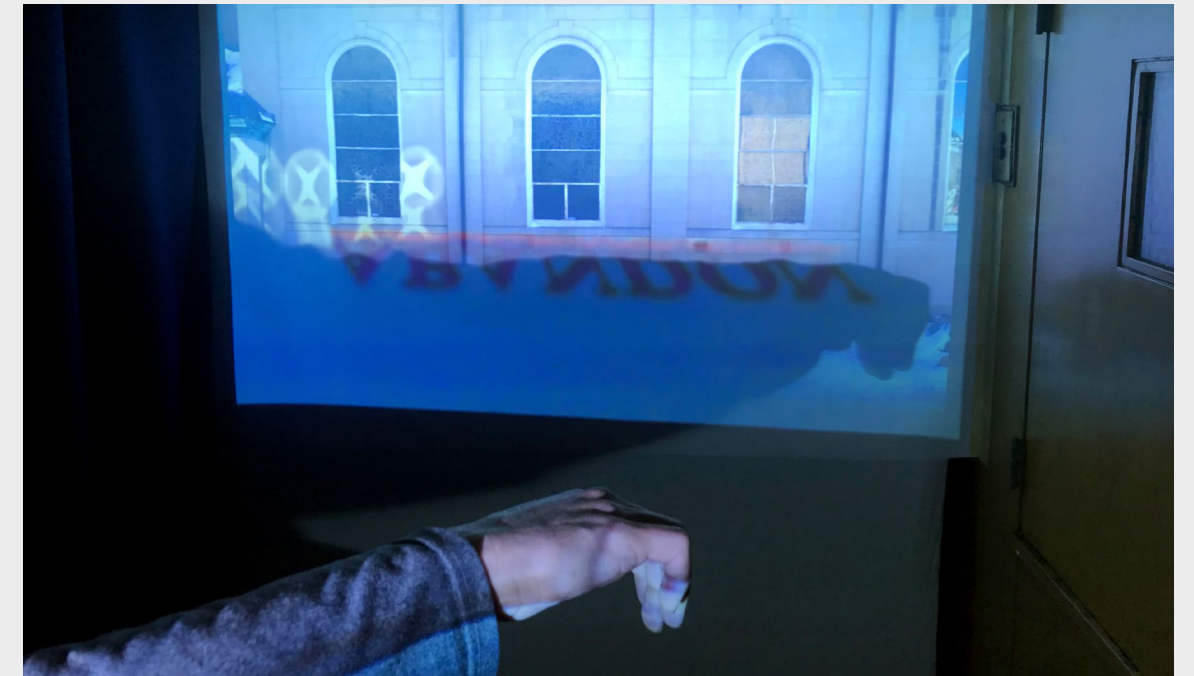


UV-printed glass slides viewed through a microscope in the RISD Nature Lab.

**Eclipse: Abandon**

Double-projector installation, with time lapse photography and live action footage, looped

The use of double projection creates a layering effect, whereby the color from both scenes merge. The blocking of one projector allows a clear image of the other projector to emerge from the shadow.

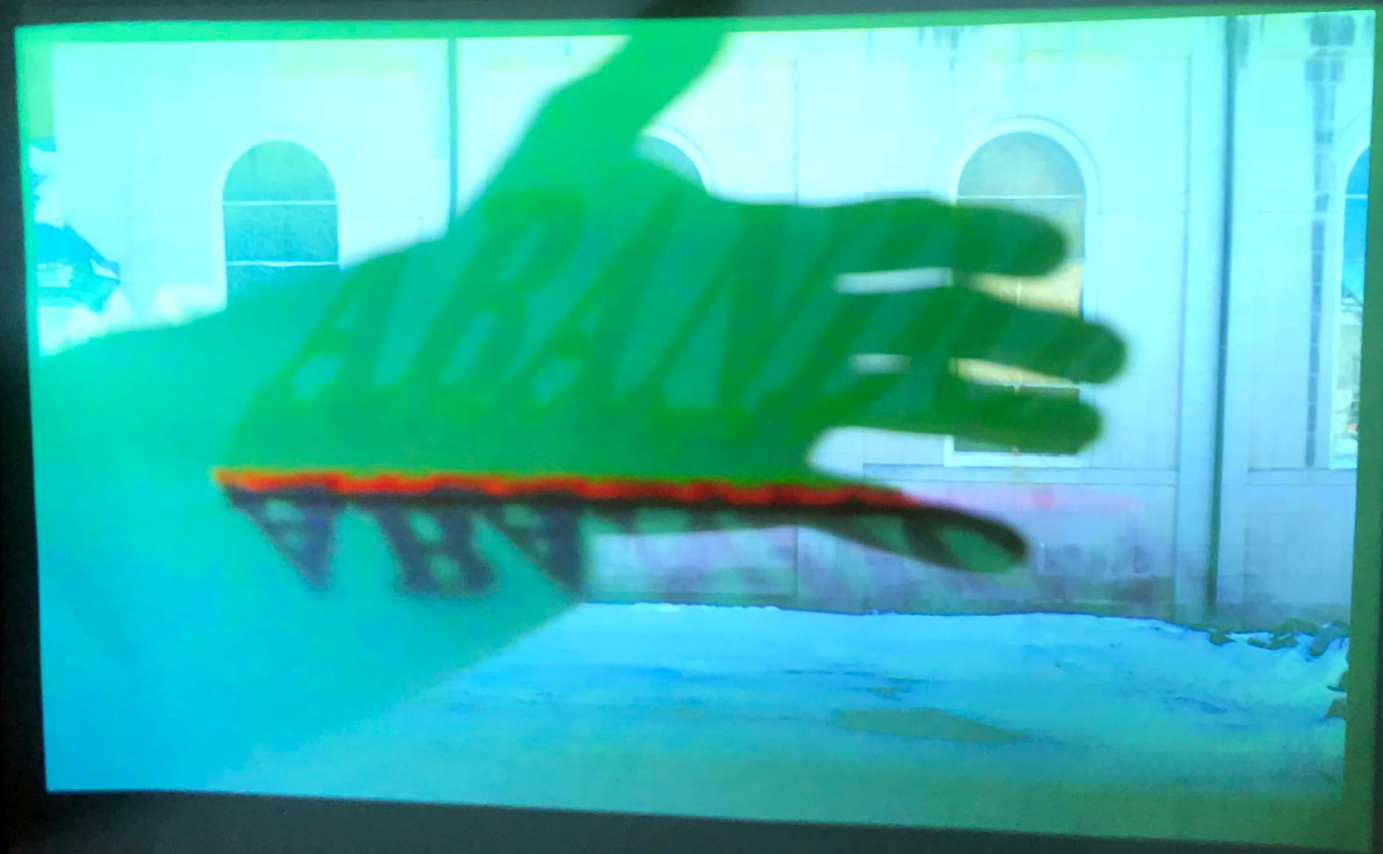


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**Inspiration**

Belgian artist Fred Eerdekens creates shadow typography from three-dimensional forms. *Men ga een zachter gang*, 2002.



The sunlight filters through the windows of an abandoned building and project onto the wall of a church. The light

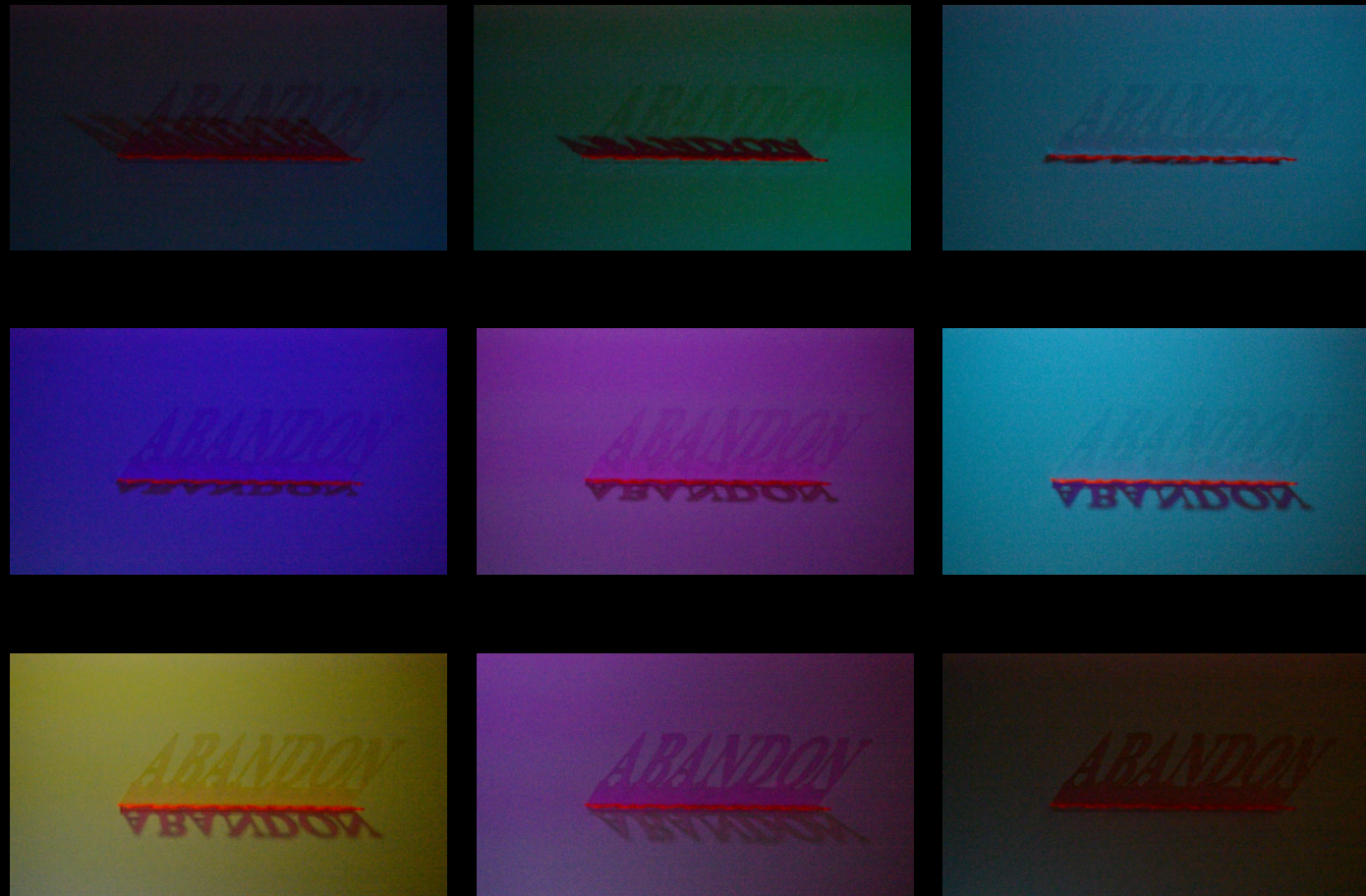
moves throughout the day with the setting of the sun.

Top-down view of acrylic laser-cut typography. The acrylic sits upright on a clear base. A color-changing light bulb produces a variety of colored shadows that move in tandem with the bulb's movement.

Opposite: The progression of the light bulb moving across the 3D typography. This video projects from high up in the installation space, so the picture wouldn't get blocked as the other one does.



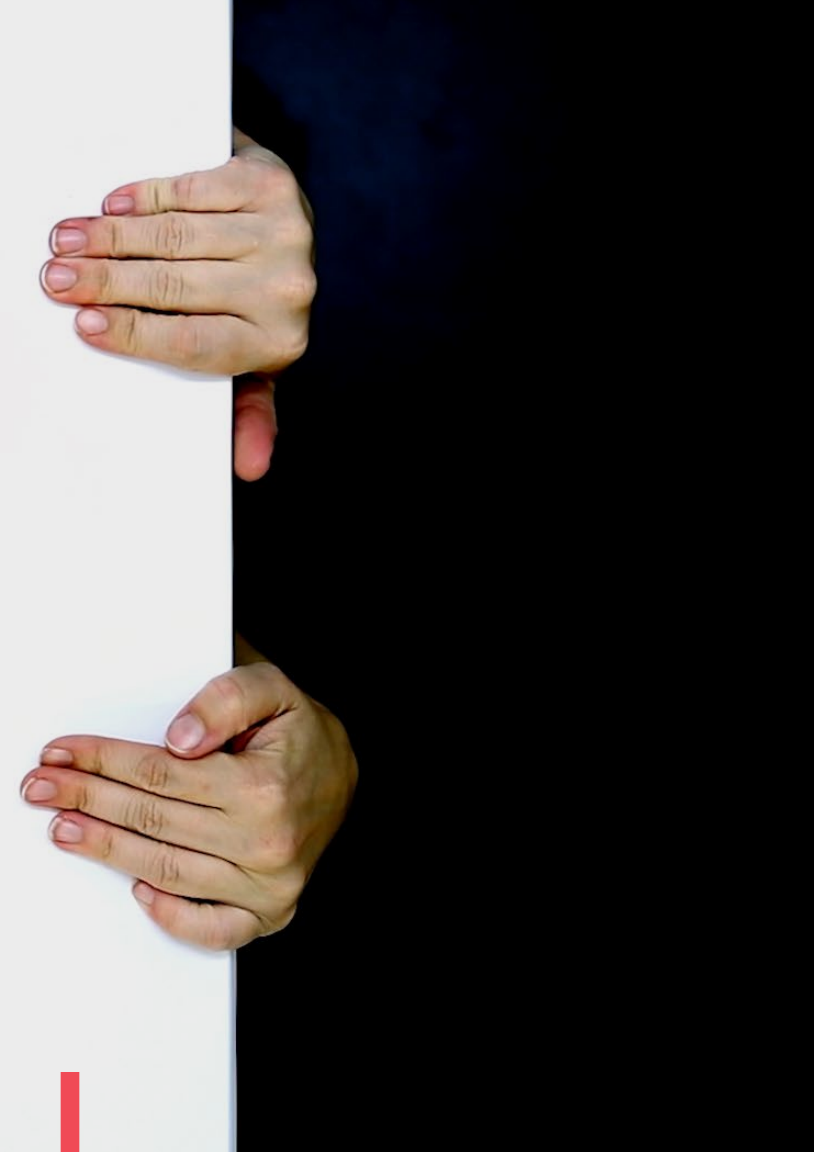
E. Ron Kang's one-day installation at the ICP Museum in New York City in 2014 uses double projection to reveal archival imagery below a monochrome view.



## Inner Text

Video

Duration: 1 minute 2 seconds



A closeup of digital text becomes black and white form. The view shifts perspectives as hands enter the space.

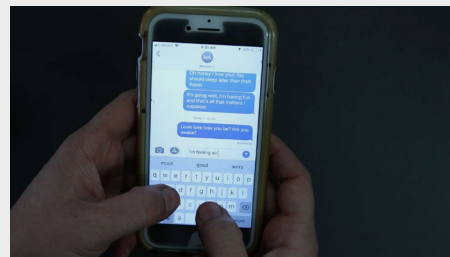
## Inner Text

Video

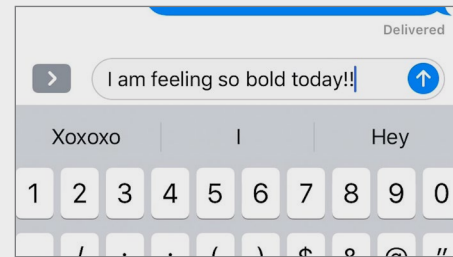
Duration: 1 minute 2 seconds

A play on words, *Inner Text* takes conversation in and out of the digital and physical spaces it inhabits. This video explores the relationship between words and meaning, and words and space. The main character (played by me) initially expresses a gumption for boldness, but ultimately loses steam as reality shifts. The camera focus zooms closely in on a digital text message,

which then becomes a deep hole from which the character emerges. The text transitions once again to physical paper before re-entering the screen world. Quirky and humorous in tone, the video contains minimal but accentuated audio in order to create a soundscape for this strange environment created by altering the familiar.



00:06



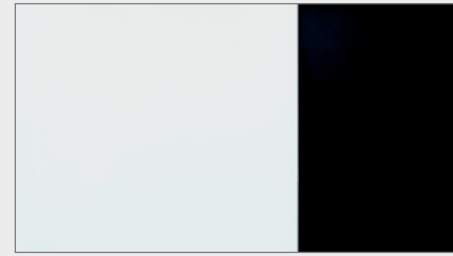
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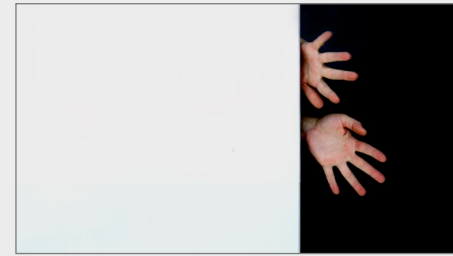
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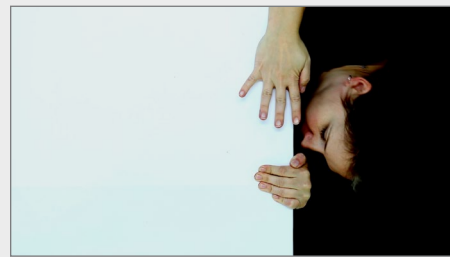
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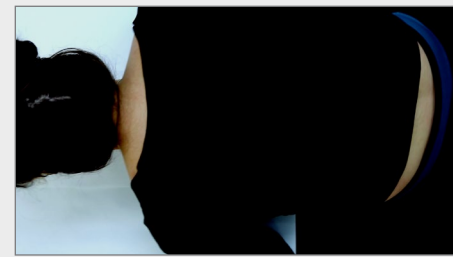
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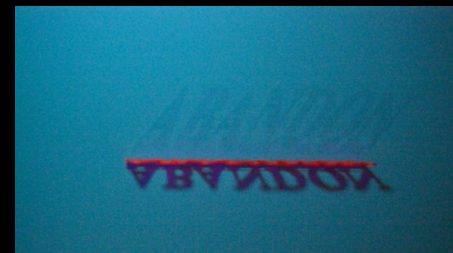
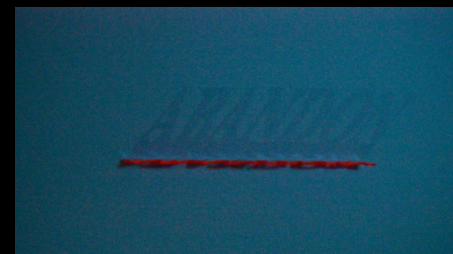
00:26



00:28

62

Inner Text



62



00:30

TRANSPOSE

63

## Inner Text

Video

Duration: 1 minute 2 seconds

A play on words, *Inner Text* takes conversation in and out of the digital and physical spaces it inhabits. This video explores the relationship between words and meaning, and words and space. The main character (played by me) initially expresses a gumption for boldness, but ultimately loses steam as reality shifts. The camera focus zooms closely in on a digital text message,

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63



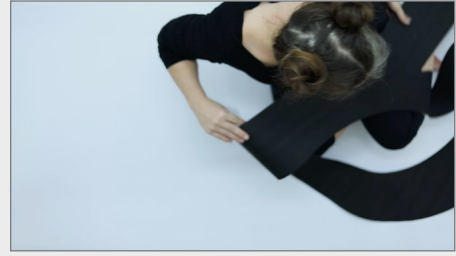
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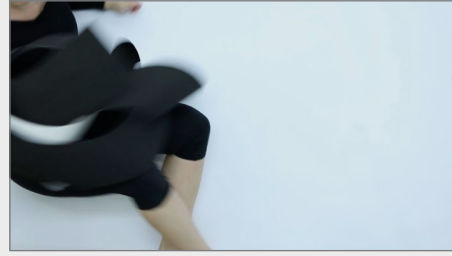
00:37



00:42



00:50



00:55



00:58



01:02

“Our optic flow melds with input from other senses. Our ‘camera angle’ changes with each turn of the head. Visual stimuli mix with sound, smell, touch, and the weight and location of bodies in space.”

—ELLEN LUPTON

## Janet Cardiff

Interview: Movement, Participation and Wonder

Janet Cardiff is a Canadian artist who works primarily with sound and installation in partnership with her husband, George Bures Miller. Using binaural audio, they create three-dimensional sound experiences. Janet uses the act of walking to engage the senses, and her walks range from pure audio to video walks. The way that participants begin to align their movements with the artist’s recorded movements creates a kind of intimate choreography between the past and the present. She and George leverage the magical quality of technology in their work, resulting in a richly complex emotional effect that create both a disturbance and a sense of wonder. Janet’s work has been internationally recognized since the mid-nineties.

Prior to speaking with Janet Cardiff, I sent her agent a few questions to pass along to her via email. To my surprise and delight, she suggested I record a brief conversation with her over the phone.

**J:** So your first question was about walks and the senses?

**A:** Yes. One of the things that really fascinates me about your work is how you have people walking through different physical locations, and really leverage that type of movement. What does having people walk through space mean for you conceptually?

**J:** It's funny how it first started in 1991, and you don't realize at the time you were doing an activity as an artist. Basically I was doing something for myself that I found interesting—walking and listening to my previously-recorded voice, footsteps, and breath—and realizing that it might be interesting for other people to do too. And then I was in sort of a workshop or a residency at the Banff Center. And when I invited other people to listen to it too, they were also very fascinated because there had been walks before with audio, but not with the binaural. So the combination of the binaural created this sense of magic and realness, and my voice walking and talking about what was around me created this sense of early mindfulness that is now quite a movement. I think that it connects to this idea of intimacy, which is also a big discussion ongoing, because of the balance between the way we are becoming segregated through technology is creating a first generation—or first couple of generations—that are dealing with loneliness on a scale not seen before. So I'm very curious about that connection—how through technology you can create a sense of connection with the world, but also connection with another person, even if they are a virtual person.

Janet's first audio walk at the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada was mixed on a four-track cassette deck in 1991.



**A:** Do you feel like your work has shifted or developed as technology has become more prevalent? How does it address the technological distance that we can sometimes experience?

**J:** Yeah, I think in ways, because there is a lot more discussion on ideas of isolation. So there has been one walk, like I think the last audio video walk that George and I did at the Los Angeles Philharmonic—we just finished it a few months ago. It does deal with the idea of the isolation in the city—in a big city like Los Angeles.

**A:** So since you're inviting people to take a journey essentially with you—it's through your past and their present—how do you start to balance your artistic control or your intent with the willpower of the participants?

**J:** That's an interesting question because in the nineties when I first started the audio walks, people were very much into this idea of a master narrative and not wanting people to control that. But it was only really the critics and writers who thought about that. And what I found, is that people generally doing the walks connect to the playful aspect and connect to the game of *Simon Says* of it, and that it is actually a relief. You can talk to lots of S and M people—it's a relief to give up your power and to be led. As long as you know that you can trust this person. And so we're very aware of that when we're designing where the walks go that it's not going to be dangerous for them going down stairs, or crossing streets, or getting mugged or whatever. And then we can instill fear in a way that is a safe—a fear like going to a horror movie or a mystery movie. But I really don't think it's an issue for people who participate. And I always say for those people who don't like control issues, it's only a voice on a player. You know, you can stand there and listen to it anywhere if you want. It's like a choice of: "Do I take this sidewalk, or do I take it walking through the highway?" You can choose your path. Life is a self-serve party.

**A:** That's true. You know, it's really fascinating because part of me is curious about *your* giving up of artistic control, in essence, because someone else is performing the work.

**J:** Yeah, but that's what's fascinating, because for every person it's a different walk. Like how often do you get the ability as an artist to create that many multiple walks that if someone walks at this point in time they are going to encounter a completely different world than someone else? And that meshes with you creating one world with the audio and video and then another world with the reality that's around the person walking. And then the third world is the combination of the two.

**A:** In the sense that each person is going to have their own individual experience while they're listening to this and having their own journey, is it about self-awareness and their perception of the experience? Or do you also hope that it becomes something that people share?



**J:** I think there are a lot of subtexts to it, and I don't claim to have invented the subtext. I think it's inherent in the technology itself, in that as you walk with a voice, you start to realize how much you're becoming a cyborg, and it's almost like an avatar relationship. It's a safe way to create the intimacy between the artist and the person. So I don't think people are thinking of other people doing it and that it's different for them. They're thinking it's a very self-absorbed activity. They're walking, they're trying to cope with all the information coming in on the media level and then cope with all the information coming on and the other level, and sometimes it's overwhelming, but it puts them into this state of discovering the questions that we all have about reality. It can be answered in ways by the subconscious during a walk like this because it's like Philosophy 101: how do we understand our environment if not by the senses? And if you screw with the senses, then that really does fuck with reality.

**A:** Right. I think that really leads me to this question about magic. You have these moments that are essentially a blending of fiction and reality and you're controlling the senses in a way that allows people to contemplate that—which I think is just so fantastic. From a personal standpoint, what does magic mean to you?

**J:** George and I really enjoy the aspect of creating installations that create wonder, and have this sense of a magical experience. I'm not sure why we're so fascinated with that, but it relates right back to being a child and seeing something that you don't quite understand intellectually. But it relates to the other senses. Like in one piece we have, *Opera for Small Room*, the records are playing and then all of a sudden you hear the record skip and you go, *oh no—this is gonna screw up this piece*. But then somehow the shadow in the room corrects that, and then you realize that you've been played. So what we do is we create magic and illusion, but at the same time we show the person that it's magic and illusion. It's like an inside joke, but showing how we all love it.



Cardiff and Miller's 2005 installation  
*Opera for a Small Room*.

**J:** It's funny—NPR did a series where they would talk about wonder and they interviewed me, and they interviewed Oliver Sacks and different people who deal with ideas of wonder in our world. And it is true. It's like if you're talking to someone who studies the stars in the universe, there's this wonder that we have about where we are on this planet. But then on the small scale, you can be fascinated by a magician doing a card trick. And we just love working with that. It's not really an intellectual choice. It's more of a playful connection that you can have with an audience. I guess that's about it. It's very much about the connection with the audience in different ways.

**A:** I love that. I have a partner that I also create installations with. Do you have any advice for someone who is hoping to do that in the future?



Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller

**J:** Well, we have a very lucky situation in that somehow we try to keep the ego out of it. And I see myself as lucky in that there are not as many men who don't have ego problems. And so I just happened to fall in love with someone who was very much supportive of women, and was not about getting credit even when he should have in the early days. And then when we started to officially collaborate, you can have tough discussions as long as it's about the quality of the work, but you can't make it personal. And also it's like anything—if someone comes up with an idea, you can say, well, that's really corny, but you know, you have to use tact when you say it.

**A:** Exactly.

**J:** But I think if you can cook together, you can make art together.

**A:** Well, that's good news! Thank you so much, Janet. I really appreciate it. It's been wonderful talking to you.

**J:** You too. Good luck on your thesis.

**Binaural**

Hearing with two ears, which allows living things to spatially orient sounds in the environment. This can be translated to headphones using technology that considers head size and ear shape to recreate the experience of hearing in 360 degrees.

**Soundscape**

The sound composition in any given environment. Soundscapes are landscapes of sound.

# COMVERSE

## Et Al: Axis

Collaborative book, 8.5x11", printed through lulu.com



CONVERSE  
73

## A Monologue on Dialogue

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### Conversation

A verbal and sometimes physically expressive exchange of information and ideas, which can be expressed in the form of audio or written word. Conversation often takes the shape of informal dialogue.

### Editing

The process of organizing and distilling content, which could be written, audible or visual. Editing can involve organizing, trimming, adding and correcting.

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CONVERSE  
73

When I was in third grade, my teacher gave each student a book she felt characterized their personality. My book was titled *Little Miss Chatterbox*. It felt like a dig at the time. Now I embrace it.

I am a talker. I love getting into deep conversations with others to hear their stories—their pasts, their dreams and vulnerabilities. These conversations help form intimate bonds between people of different minds and histories.

Conversation is casual. When two people participate in dialogue, they exchange more than words. Other cues tell the fuller story: body language, facial expression, proximity, volume. The essence of the conversation often delivers more than the content itself. In *The New Analog*, Damon Krukowski says, “The noises of a whisper—the nonlinguistic aspects that make it a whisper—may communicate as much as the verbal signal it contains.”<sup>1</sup> I enjoy capturing conversations and presenting them as an extension

<sup>1</sup>  
Damon Krukowski, *The New Analog: Listening and Reconnecting in a Digital World*. London: MIT Press, 2018.

to dialogue. My work makes the *nature* or *essence* of conversation the signal. I’m interested in shifting the expected experience of a conversation.

How does the recording and transcription of dialogue influence its meaning? The form of language influences how someone interprets it. When you watch a film in a foreign language, you notice the behavior and tone of the actors. You don’t necessarily have to read the words to understand what is going on. “The codes and conventions we share in language are part of a social construction,” artist and writer Tine Melzer claims. “...language behaviour is part of human practice. Comparing these practices is the perfect playground—or alibi—for trespassing in that hybrid zone between verbal and visual language, between literal and metaphorical meaning.”<sup>2</sup>

How is conversation changing? Our current context uses the spoken voice to command technology: think Alexa and Amazon Echo. Technology also

<sup>2</sup>  
Tine Melzer, *Taxidermy for Language—Animals*. Zurich: Rollo Press, 2016. (13).

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augments our voices. For example, mobile phones eliminate noise, making it more difficult to detect non-verbal sounds and a sense of *where*. Digital communications interrupt real-time exchanges. Editing becomes the norm—we are revisionists of our own digital identities, transcribed through text and email. MIT professor Sherry Turkle says, “...computers offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship and then, as the programs got really good, the illusion of friendship without the demands of intimacy. Because, face-to-face, people ask for things that computers never do.”<sup>3</sup>

Face-to-face conversation helps us develop the capacity for empathy and self-reflection. It invites spontaneity, error and tangents, making a space for intimacy. Don’t get me wrong—computers are awesome. They help me make the things I do. I want these things I make to encourage people to listen more closely and really hear what we are saying to one another—in all the ways we say them.

3

Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. New York: Penguin Press, 2015. (7).

## Et Al: Axis

Collaborative book, 8.5x11”, printed through lulu.com



CONVERSE

73

## Et Al: Axis

Collaborative book with the RISD MFA class of 2019, 8.5x11”, printed through lulu.com

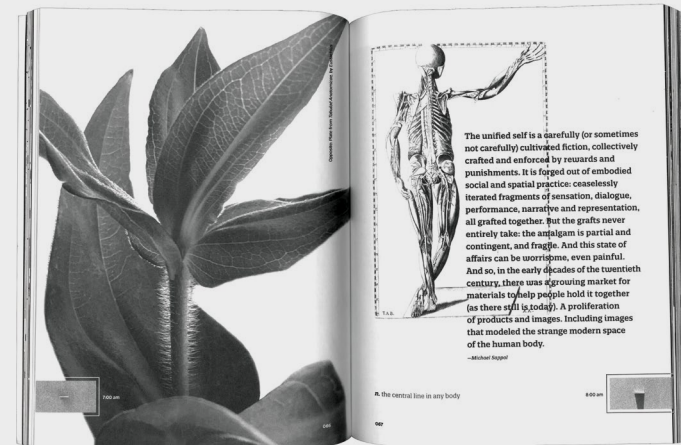
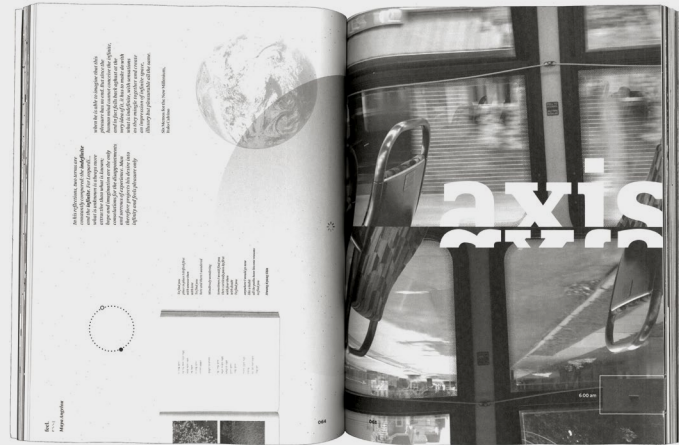
*Et Al* is a collective atlas that brings together the work of 15 RISD graduate students from the class of 2019. My section focuses on the idea of *axis*—a central dividing line. To gather content, each of us performed a series of labors, or Herculean tasks. We then created a 14-page section that worked within the whole sequence. The title of the book (coined by Olivia deSalve Villedieu) comes from the phrase “et al”, which means “and others.” This book is mine, and yours, and ours.

*Axis* juxtaposes visual pairings relating to various meanings of the word “axis.” Imagery ranges from cartwheels to audio waves of a recorded conversation. The text pulls from quotes and personal writings. It highlights the relationship between people and things, people and each other, and my relationship to Providence—a new and uncomfortable place for me at the time. *Axis* shows a desire for connection, while revealing some of the subtle connections that exist in the spaces of one’s experience—if one we take the moment to look.

77



Axis begins on a spread next to Eury Kim's final page. The split headline references the line of axis.

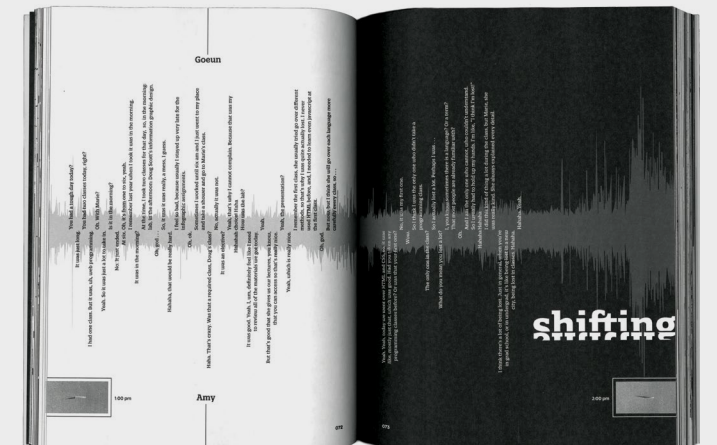
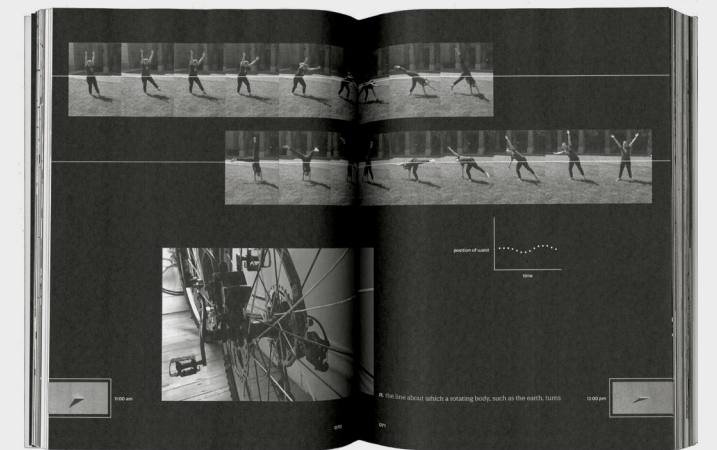


74

Et Al: Axis



Photographs taken in oft-visited places around RISD, layered with overlapping vector images and typography



CONVERSE  
75

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augments our voices. For example, mobile phones eliminate noise, making it more difficult to detect non-verbal sounds and a sense of *where*. Digital communications interrupt real-time exchanges. Editing becomes the norm—we are revisionists of our own digital identities, transcribed through text and email. MIT professor Sherry Turkle says, "...computers offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship and then, as the programs got really good, the illusion of friendship without the demands of intimacy. Because, face-to-face, people ask for things that computers never do."<sup>3</sup>

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Essay: A Monologue on Dialogue

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77



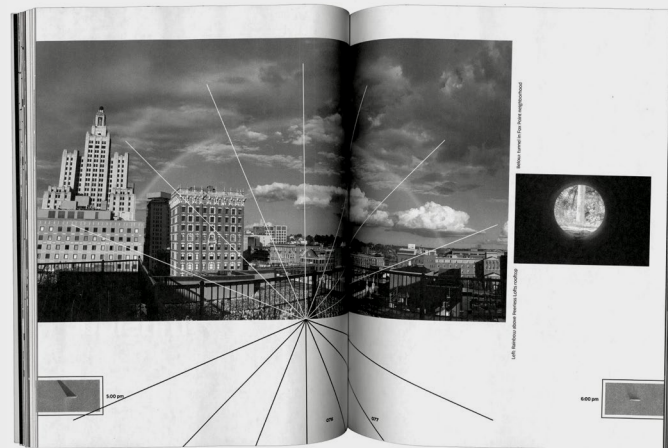
# Hear Me, See Them

With Zoe Schneider  
 Workshop, documented with photography and video  
 Duration: 20 minutes

*Hear Me, See Them* is a collaborative workshop with Zoe Shneider (RISD GD BFA '19) intended to defamiliarize intimate conversations between people. Four participants at a time listen and speak to one another with headphones on their mobile phones. Two participants pair up and sit across from one another at a table. The other pair faces each other in a separate room. They take turns responding to personal yet non-invasive prompts including "describe to your partner your childhood home" and "describe your best friend

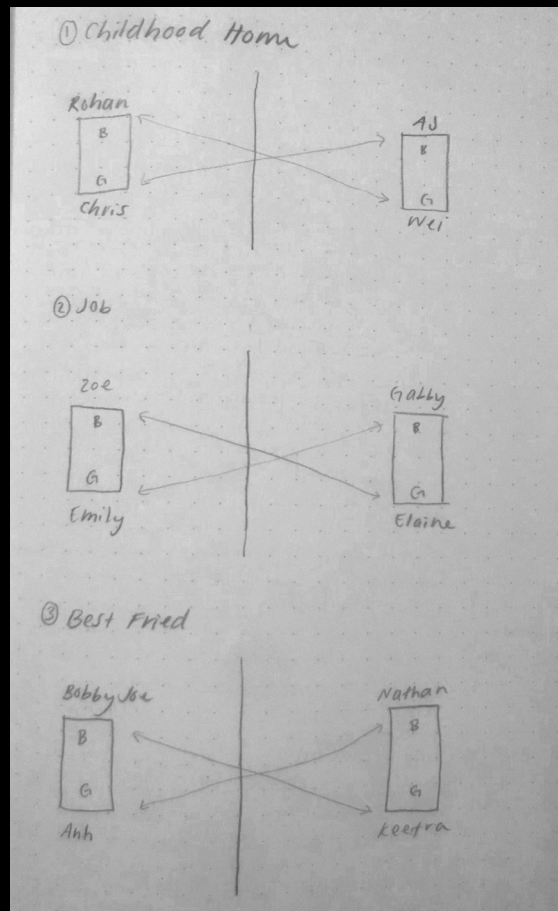
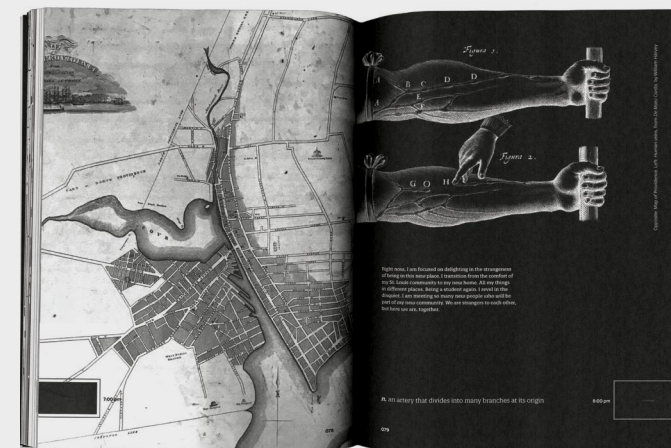
to your partner." While facing their partner, they converse with a participant in the next room. This creates a strange and unexpected relationship between what you hear and what you perceive by observing body language and facial expressions. During the workshop, moments occur where tones of verbal conversation and body language clash. One participant discusses the mafia in his hometown, while his facing partner giggles as she listens to a story about shag carpet.

Opposite: Sketch of how participants interact with each other based on room, audio pairings and topic.



Left: A transcription of a conversation with Goeun Park bleeds into the typographic grid.

Right: The final grid spread lives next to Annaka Olsen's section.



People were paired to listen to unfamiliar (not close friends) voices and stories, and to prompts that we thought were personal but not too invasive.

## Hear Me, See Them

With Zoe Schneider  
Workshop, documented with photography and video  
Duration: 20 minutes



78 Design partner Zoe Schneider participates in the workshop.

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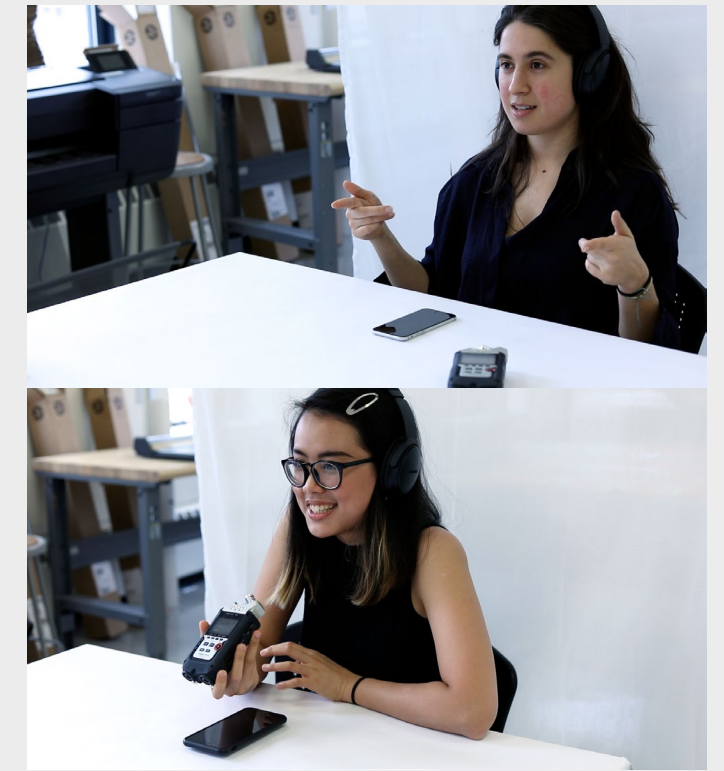
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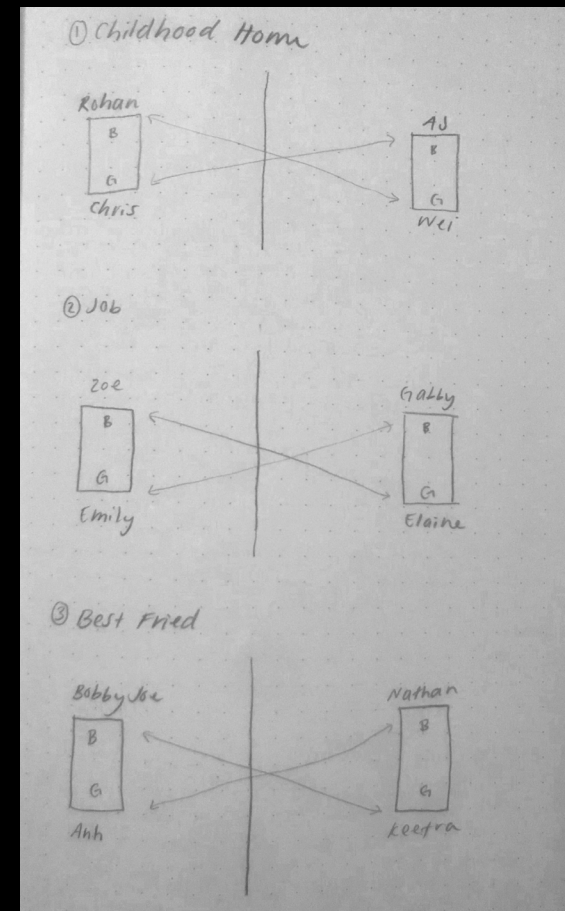


Participants sit at a white table with a white linen backdrop. Instructions on screen guide the conversation, recorded on a ZOOM recorder. Noise-cancelling



headphones allow the participants to listen to their partner in the next room without hearing the person sitting across from them.

Pictured, clockwise from top left: Chris Cote, Emily Guez, Ahn Lee and Rohan Chaurasia.



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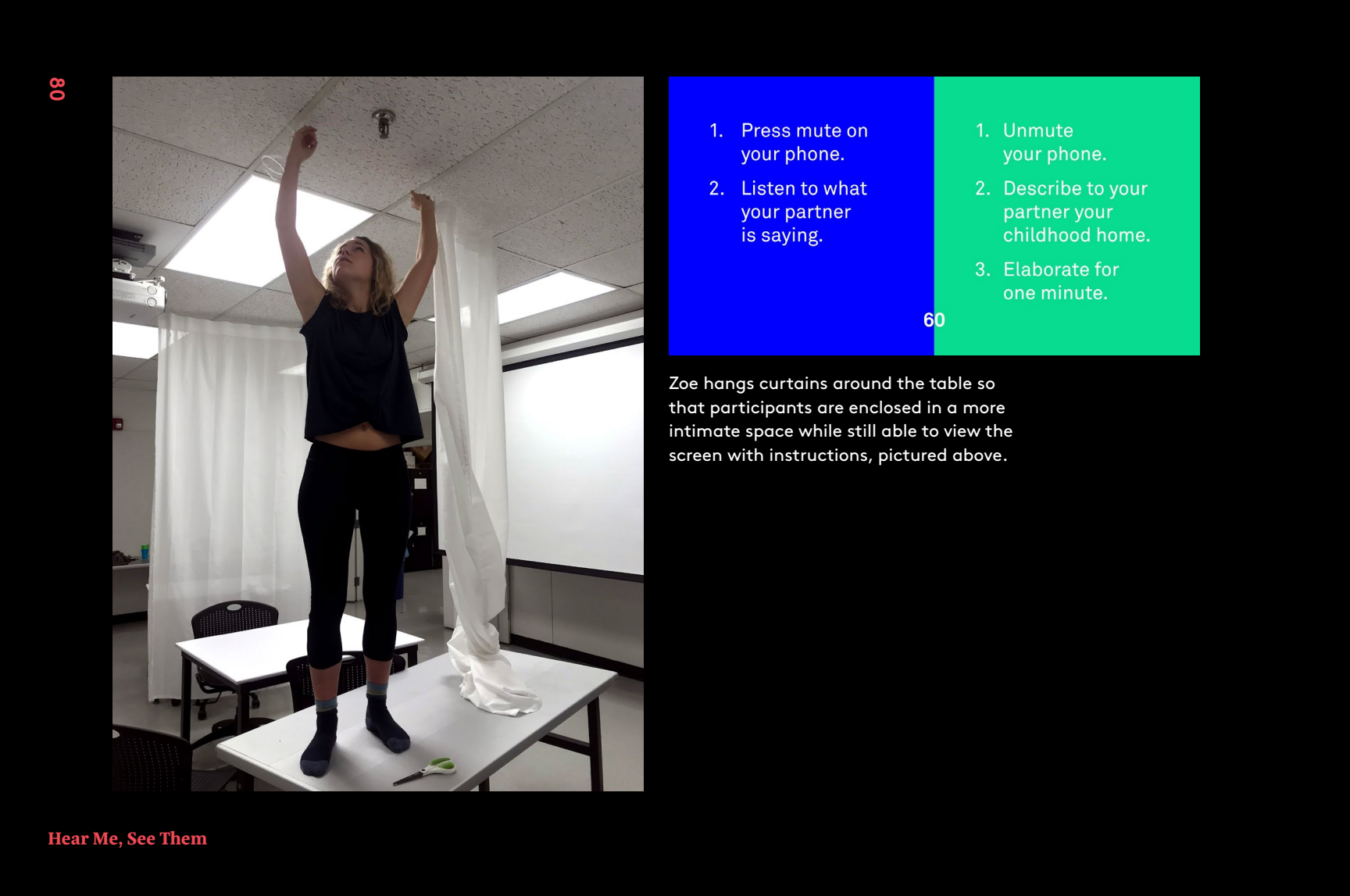




Table cards and a timed slideshow instruct participants to call their audio partners and begin conversing on specific topics.

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Hear Me, See Them



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Press mute on your phone.</li> <li>2. Listen to what your partner is saying.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unmute your phone.</li> <li>2. Describe to your partner your childhood home.</li> <li>3. Elaborate for one minute.</li> </ol> |
|---|---|

Zoe hangs curtains around the table so that participants are enclosed in a more intimate space while still able to view the screen with instructions, pictured above.

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Hear Me, See Them

# Pause

Poster  
36 x 52 cm



The full poster integrates multiple photographic perspectives of prismatic light. Tidbits of recorded conversation weave in and out of the light casts, evoking the essence of conversation.

*Pause* is a poster that responds to the underlying themes in the 1938 play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. They introduce ideas surrounding the transience of human life and the preciousness of everyday personal interactions. With this poster, I sought to re-contextualize the themes of mundanity, staging and the transitory to form a personal yet universal narrative. I captured passing and seemingly ordinary moments of dialogue between myself and my studiomates. Transcribed conversations weave in and out of colored prismatic light. *Pause* becomes a visual record of sound and light.

The word "pause" appears throughout the play's script to instruct actors to rest between phrases. For me, "pause" can also act as a reminder for us to take a moment to appreciate the smaller, seemingly mundane interactions that form human relationships. I projected the word on the wall, and manipulated it into fragments by moving a prism in front of the projector. The captured light—also intangible and fleeting, creates a kind of staged condition, intended to reflect the theatrical element of the play.

**Amy:** Is it fun times over here?

**Jenn:** It's great times.

**Lauren:** I'm a bunny!

**Amy:** Haha! That's what I call my dog!

You're eating like a rabbit too!

**Lauren:** Anigula!

**Amy:** It's spicy!

**Lauren:** Usually I eat it with lettuce,  
and I forgot how spicy it is.

**Amy:** I used to grow this shit.

**Lauren:** Like a bunny?

**Amy:** Yeah. We used to grow all sorts  
of stuff in our garden . . .

**Lauren:** Do you remember happiness?

**Amy:** . . . back when I had a yard.

**Lauren:** Remember who we used to be?

**Amy:** Kinda!

**Maria:** Like I want to write about  
Gaudí . . . Woah big topic I know!

**Amy:** I think it's more than three.

**Annaka:** Would you call that a pile  
of sunglasses?

**Joel:** A pile sort of has to make a pyramid  
shape. That's what makes a pile. I don't  
know what's going on here, but that's a pile.

**Annaka:** You don't think that's a sculpture?

**Amy:** It can't be in a row.

**Joel:** It can't be in a row!

**Amy:** Is this the rug?

**Marie:** Yeah.

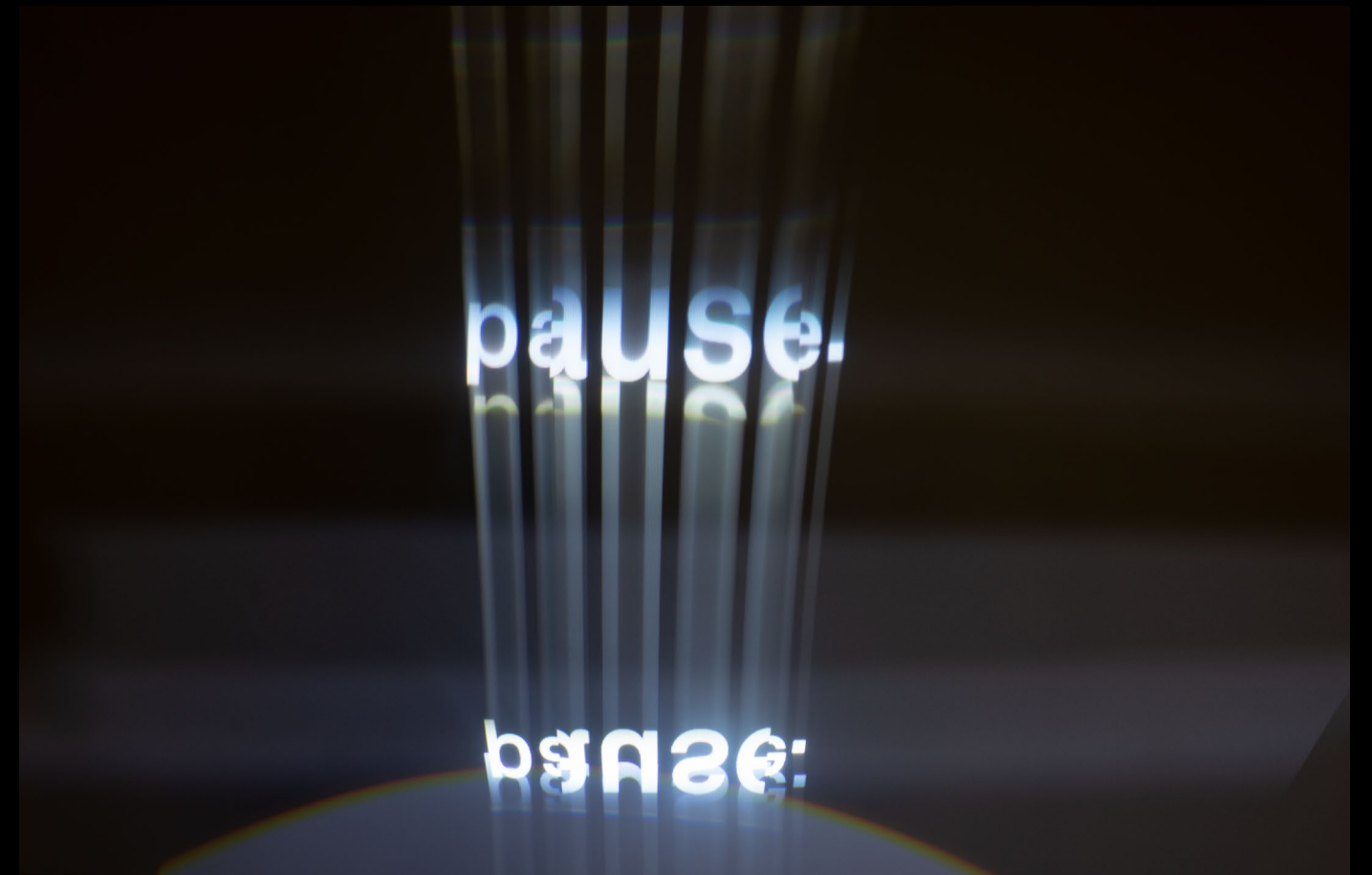
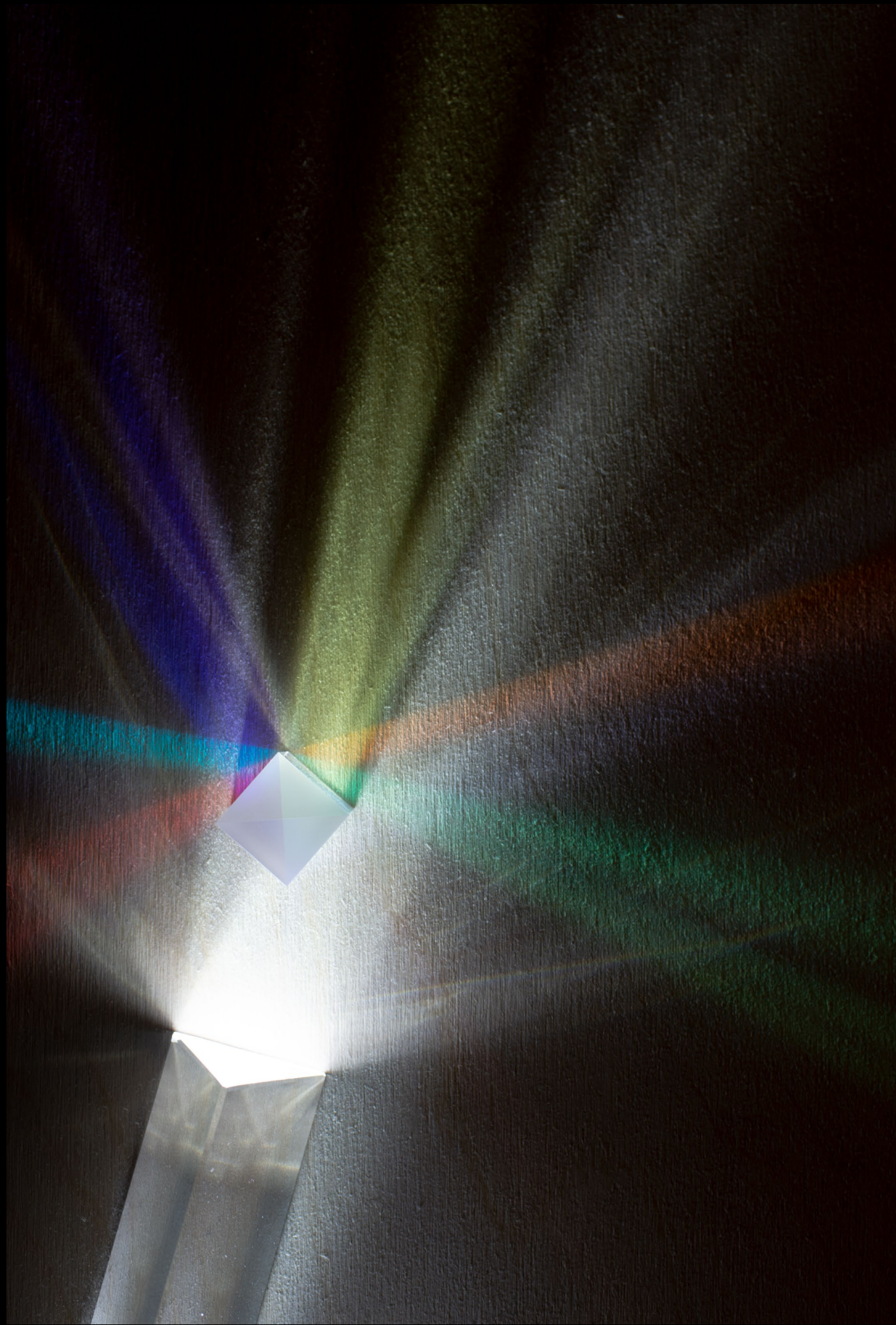
**Marie:** Um, no, I've just been  
sitting on it. Literally.

**Maria:** Good things always end.  
That's why they are good.

**Goeun:** Hmm.

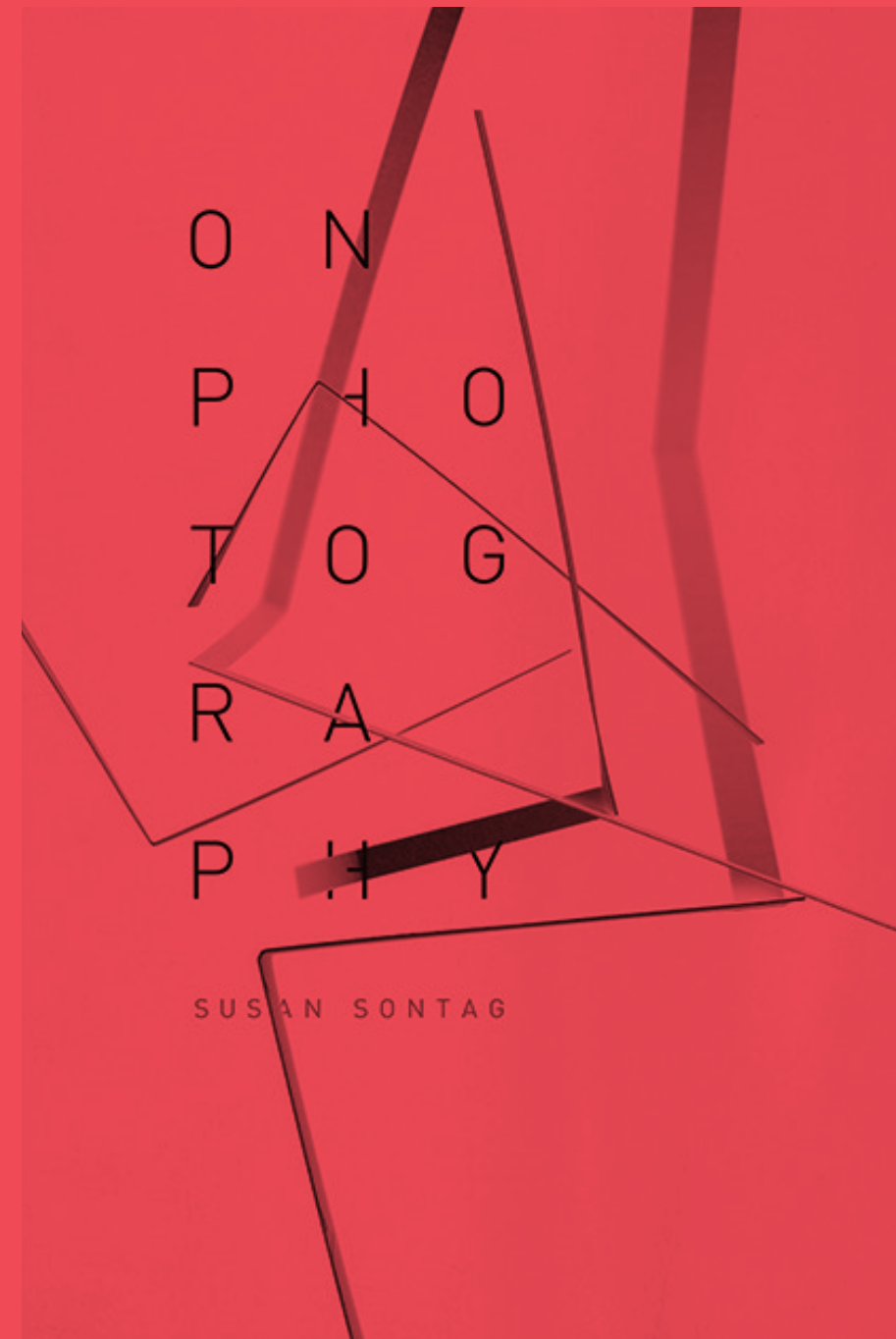
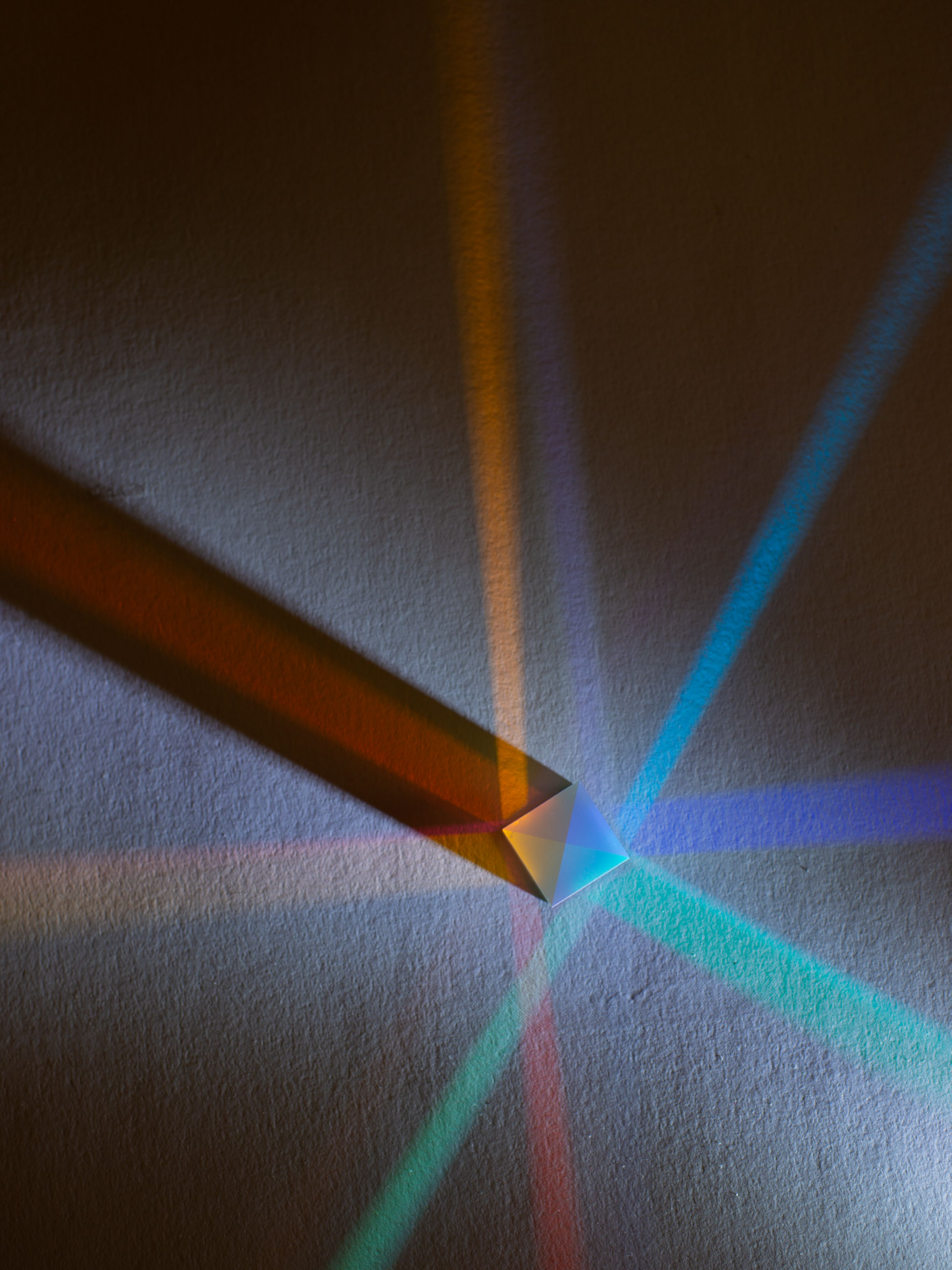
**Amy:** It just . . . feels so crazy!  
It's just so fast.

palouse.



A deep investigation into the behavior of light, projection and prisms led to the typographic and photographic compo-

sition. Projected digital type fractures and stretches when a prism blocks the projector's lens.



### Inspiration

Book cover and poster designed by duo Anne Jordan and Mitch Goldstein, who both received their undergraduate degrees at RISD.





### Inspiration

Professor Thomas Weddell encourages experimentation with form using photography. During the process of creating *Pause*, he recalled and shared with me a poster he designed with Nancy Skolos using prisms. His approach and feedback influenced my formal design decisions.

## Extinct Words

Audio piece

Duration: 2 minutes 30 seconds

Interviewees: Carson Evans, Eury Kim, Ji Kim, Marie Otsuka, Marcus Peabody, Bobby Joe Smith, Angela Torchio and June Yoon



Interviewees first receive a red card with an obsolete English word or phrase on top. After they attempt to describe the word's meaning, they turn the card over to view its true definition. Participant Ji Kim displays her first phrase for the camera.

Public discourse inevitably changes over time. *Extinct Words* highlights several slang words disappearing from the English Lexicon, identified by the Dictionary of American Regional English. In this audio piece, interviewees from various parts of the US and around the globe attempt to discuss and define these endangered words. Examples include bonnyclabber (thick sour milk) and sony (cute, charming, lively). I had so much fun interviewing people and editing the audio.

This layered mashup of voices touches upon themes surrounding conversation, language and repetition, humor, lost meaning and place.

At moments, the conversations converge to create a jumble of noise. It becomes increasingly difficult to pinpoint one voice from the others. Other moments distill into discreet voices jumping back and forth, surrounded by silence. The meaning emerges from the noise itself, rather than from the specifics of the content.

Alright, so I'm here with Carson  
Ok, so I'm sitting here with Ji  
I'm here with Bobby Joe  
Hello  
I'm here with Angela  
Hello  
I'm here with Marcus

Hi, how are you?  
My name is Marie  
My name  
is Eury Kim

Can you tell us a little bit about where you're from,  
where you live?

I am from South Korea  
I am from North Dakota  
I am from Atlanta, Georgia  
and Minnesota

I don't have a southern accent  
I lived equally in both places...

I am from many  
different places

just had to get that out  
of the way

it's a big city hehehe

I was

originally born  
in the south of  
Korea but I've  
never lived there.

I was

Uh, I am from Arizona

Tempe, Arizona

born in Boston and am from  
an American family but lived  
in the UK most of my life

I am from Japan,  
originally from Japan

So today we are going to be exploring different words  
that are going extinct in the English language  
Words that are going out of the English lexicon  
So we can see what you think they mean

Yes, yes  
Ok, that's cool

Ok, so the first word is right here  
and it is bonnyclabber.

Bonnyclabber:  
thick, sour  
milk

If i were going to take a stab  
I would think just cuz clabber  
and you think of like  
I guess I'm thinking of clobber

I can think of clobber  
and clad

And like to put down and  
squash something, so maybe  
this is like some sort of mallet

It also makes me think of lard.

or a staff in which you would  
like crunch something?

I'm having associations  
with nice pie crust.

Can you please tell me what this word is?

Oh man. Haha, fogo—I'll just  
go with my initial reaction of  
it's to forgo something  
hahahaha  
To forgo something,  
it's like the shortened version

It almost sounds like FOMO

Yeah yeah... Exactly...  
it's like faster you know,  
like a fogo Hahaahaha  
Yeah, it seems like,  
what are those things called?  
An acronym, right?

Sing songy?

If it was an acronym, what would it be?

Oh, oh goodness, um fear of  
going out? I would use this all  
the time because I'm such a homebody

That's totally it! I think you nailed it! Ahhahaa

An offensive smell  
ohmigoodness, wow  
I don't know why, but right when  
you handed this over, it seemed like  
it would be some kind of fabric  
Yeah, i have no idea why

Supple sawney  
supple sawney is just one of  
those guys that's super lanky  
You know, didn't really make  
their hands rough with work  
Just sort of like a bookworm,  
you know, a little loner off to himself.  
It wasn't necessarily an affectionate  
term, I would say.  
Yeah.

Oh  
It's thick sour milk,  
that is waaaay gross!

Fogo: an  
offensive smell.  
Northeast.

FOMO: fear of  
missing out.  
Current.

Sonsy: cute,  
charming, lively.

Sonsy.  
it's like singy-songy

You know, i think it  
can also be applied  
metaphorically, like um  
you know, that poster  
is a little sonsy.

Cute, charming lively?  
Kind of! Kind of.

Supple sawney:  
a homemade  
jointed doll that  
can be made  
to dance.

To be on one's  
beanwater:  
to be in  
high spirits,  
feel frisky.  
Northeast.

To be on one's beanwater.

What kind of fabric do you think it would be?

I was thinking like lace?

Something really delicate?

Yeah, really delicate.

Because bean is not really  
flavored, it doesn't really taste  
without any seasoning  
it seems like  
really plain.

So close.

A homemade jointed doll

that can be made to dance

So based on that

it just means like

it's very bored,

and very neutral, and not very,

I don't know... flavorful?

So it's just like

oh woah! Um, it means

to be in high spirits.

To feel frisky

To feel frisky

Spouty: of  
ground; soggy,  
spongy.

I have the vision of it  
being like the end of a  
gutter from your house?  
That thing where the water  
shoots out. The spouty.

That's the spouty part!

Or you might say it like,  
my, your tea kettle is  
quite spouty!

Hahaha i love it. Great.

What about this one?  
It's like an emphatic  
form of spout.

Daddock:  
rotten wood,  
a rotten log.  
Chiefly  
New England.

Like it implies action  
and excitement.

My word  
is spouty.

Daddock. It's  
sort of like a  
fence (faking a  
British accent).

at the edge  
of a river.

So the word is popskull.

Popskull:  
cheap, illegal  
whiskey.  
Southern  
Appalachians.

Is it like a derogatory  
word for someone who's  
not that smart?

Alright, popskull.

But I think the meaning

of this is probably

something that like,

blows your mind.

Like a mindfuck,

you know?

That's what it sounds like.

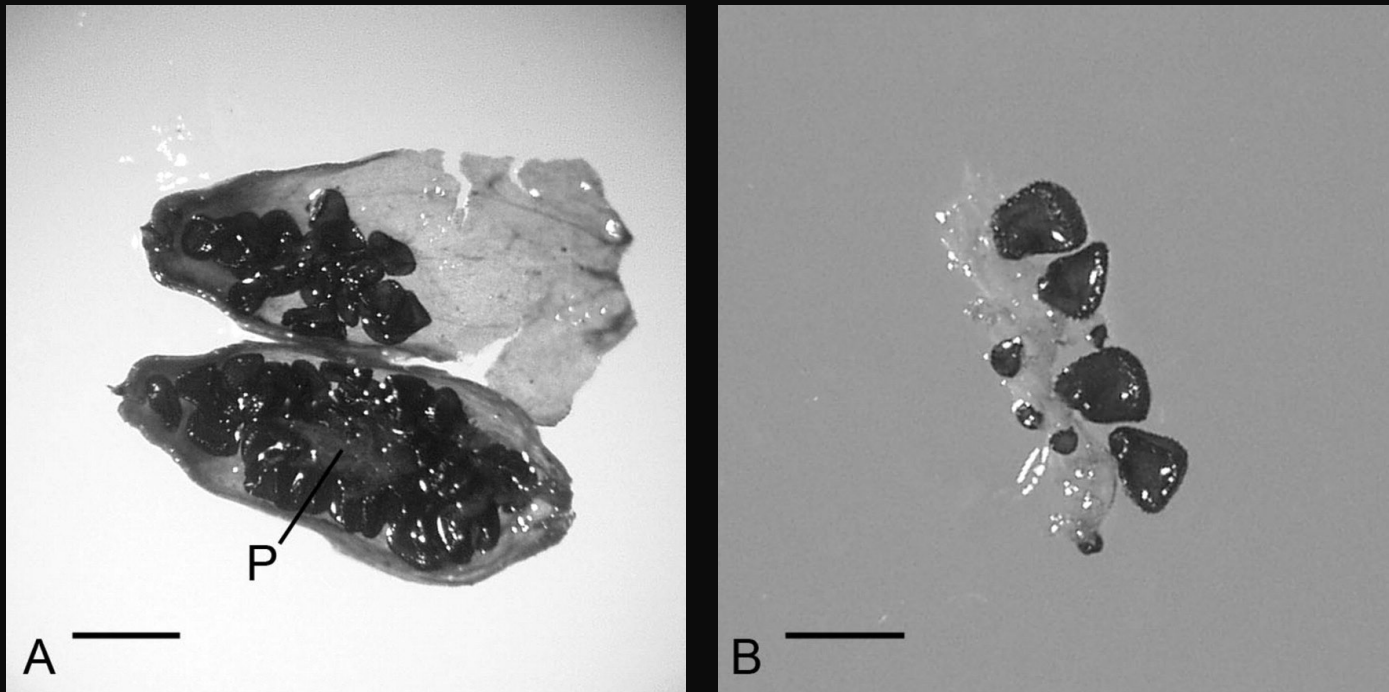
And I feel like you could

insert that and use in that kind

of realm and it might work.

It is in fact cheap or illegal whiskey!

(DING!)



## Evolve

Collaged video  
 Video duration: 00:30  
 Archival video: *Seeds and Seed Dispersal*, Prelinger Archives  
 Music: *Algea Fields*, Blue Dot Sessions



*Extinct Words* began with an article from 2012 about the successful germination from the fruit of a little arctic flower, the narrow-leaved campion, that died 32,000 years ago. A team of Russian scientists discovered

the seeds in an arctic squirrel burrow, preserved by permafrost. This led me to consider themes of extinction and evolution, resulting in *Extinct Words* as well as the following project, *Evolve*.

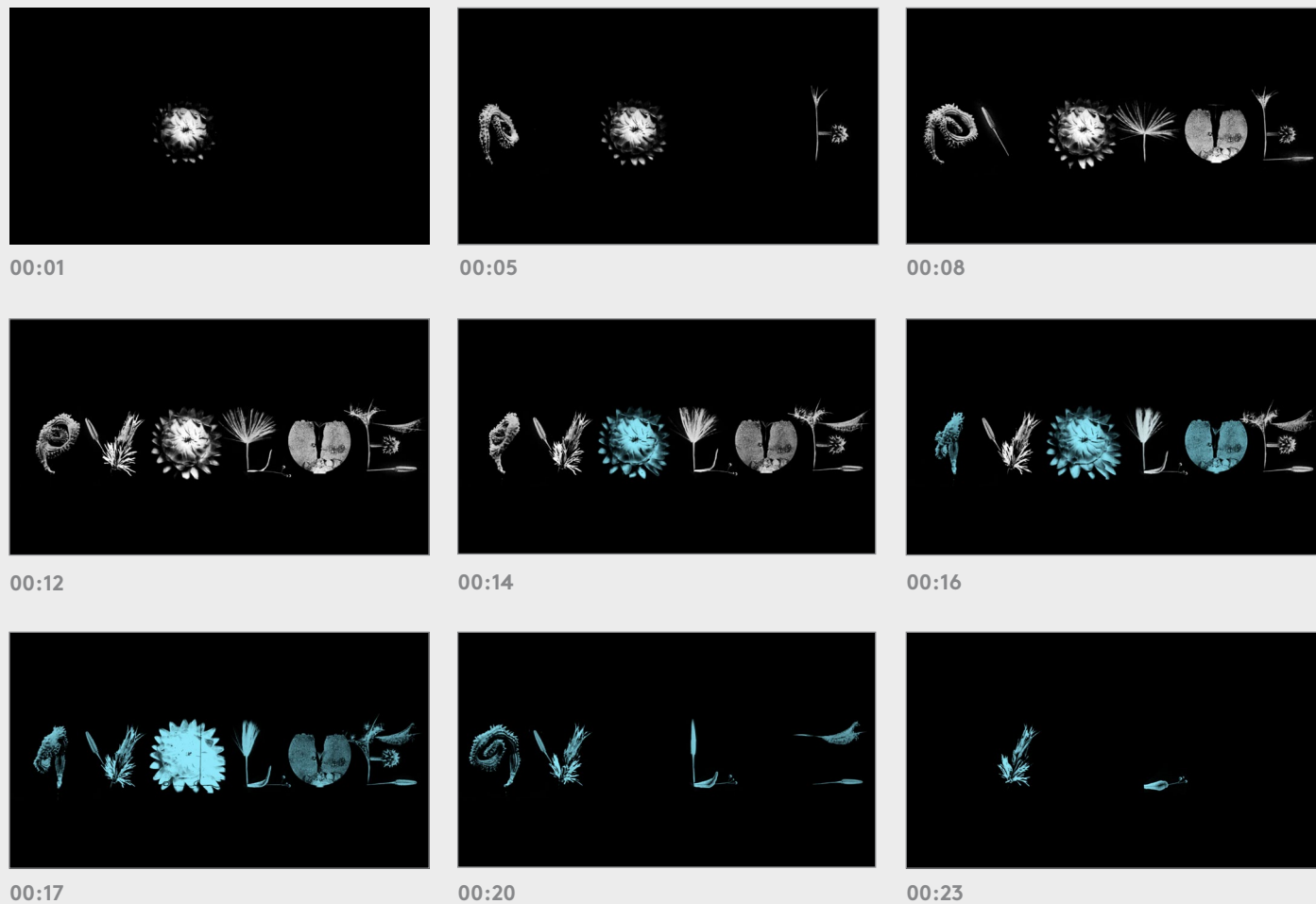
## Evolve

Collaged video  
 Duration: 30 seconds  
 Archival video: *Seeds and Seed Dispersal*, Prelinger Archives  
 Music: *Algea Fields*, Blue Dot Sessions

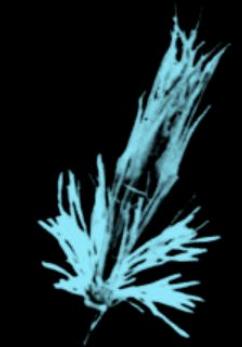
*Evolve* is a typographic video collage that visualizes the theme of evolution with archival seed footage. In 2012, Russian scientists successfully germinated flowers from a handful of 32,000 year-old seeds excavated from the Siberian tundra. This preservation was made possible by the burrowings of arctic ground squirrels. I found this story quite compelling, and wanted to develop a project highlighting growth and change. Browsing through the Prelinger Archives, I discovered a 1920s time

lapse video of seed and bud development. Collaged elements of the footage compose letterforms to spell the word "evolve." Individual parts appear sporadically to the beat of the music, building to a reveal of the full word. The letters shift in color over time, to show another mode of evolution while bringing in a sense of "now" to this old-school footage. The elements disappear over time. With change and progress also comes ending.





Individual seed videos appear on screen to reveal a typographic "evolve." They change color and ultimately disappear to the beat of the music.



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## See-Sign | See-Saw

With Joel Kern

Installation made from child's see-saw, foam, laser-cut wood, wooden planks, ink, ink rollers, two tables and acrylic. Documented as with photography and video

One table provides ink and stamps, while the other serves as the grid for the message. A lid with a latch keeps the stamps from flying out. The see-saw affords the key moment in the experience, where the paper rises to meet the bottom of the stamps.



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## See-Sign | See-Saw

With Joel Kern

Installation made from child's see-saw, foam, laser-cut wood, wooden planks, ink, ink rollers, two tables and acrylic. Documented with photography and video

How can you turn a piece of old technology into a new experience? Inspired by a Paymaster—a vintage, mid-century check-writing machine—Joel Kern and I designed a human-operated press. You select stamps and create words in your own compositions using a physical grid. First you encounter the tops of the stamps, marked with letters. You ink the stamps, place them, and then close the lid and latch. After selecting your paper and sticking it onto the flat bed, you sit on the see-saw to move the plate upwards. The paper meets the bottom of the stamps, which contain translations of the letters to hand gestures in American sign language.

We wanted to visually transcribe the language used in deaf communities in the US. Sign language is often only communicated in real time via movement. *See-Sign | See-Saw* brings attention to the language through interaction, creativity and play. The color and aesthetics of the project amplify this playfulness.

A short video documents the installation, translating the experience for others to easily understand. Participants hung their signs in a public outdoor area near RISD, to create messages and invite further interaction.

Right: To understand how the Paymaster functions, Joel and I disassemble the machine and put it back together.

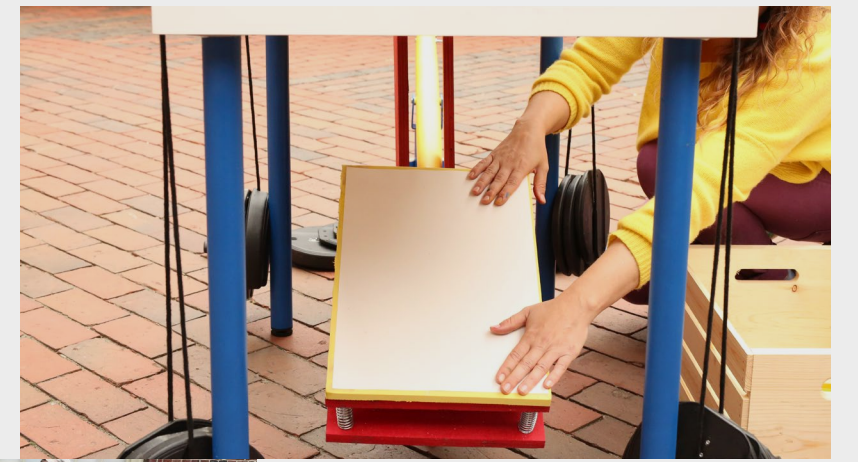


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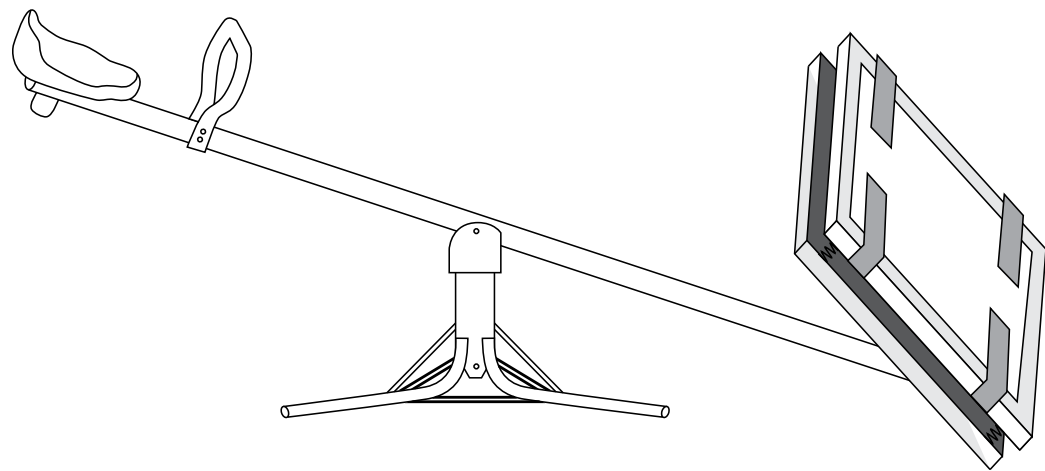


Participants ink the stamps with colors of their choice and work together to create a message on the grid.



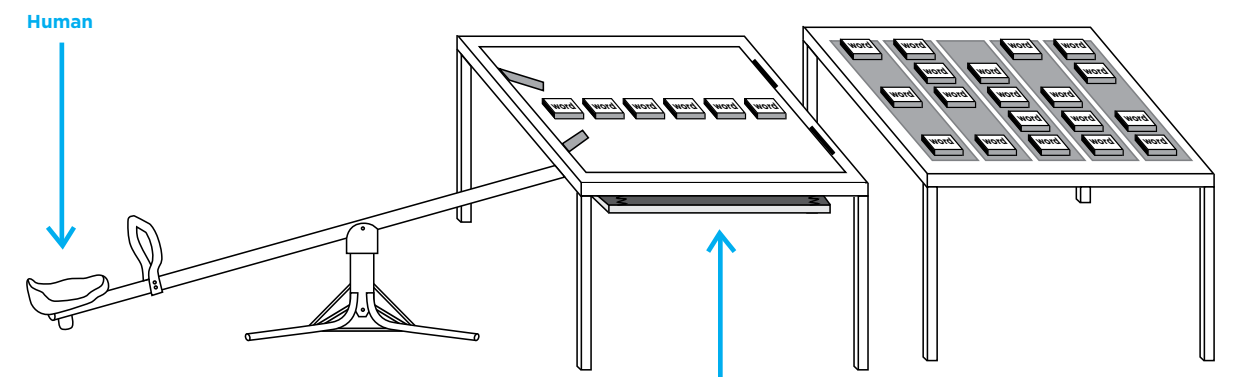
The contraption allows for choice and play, with constraints (such as paper size, position and number of characters) to smoothly guide participants through the experience.

### The See-Saw



Proposal sketches to demonstrate how See-Sign / See-Saw works.

### The System



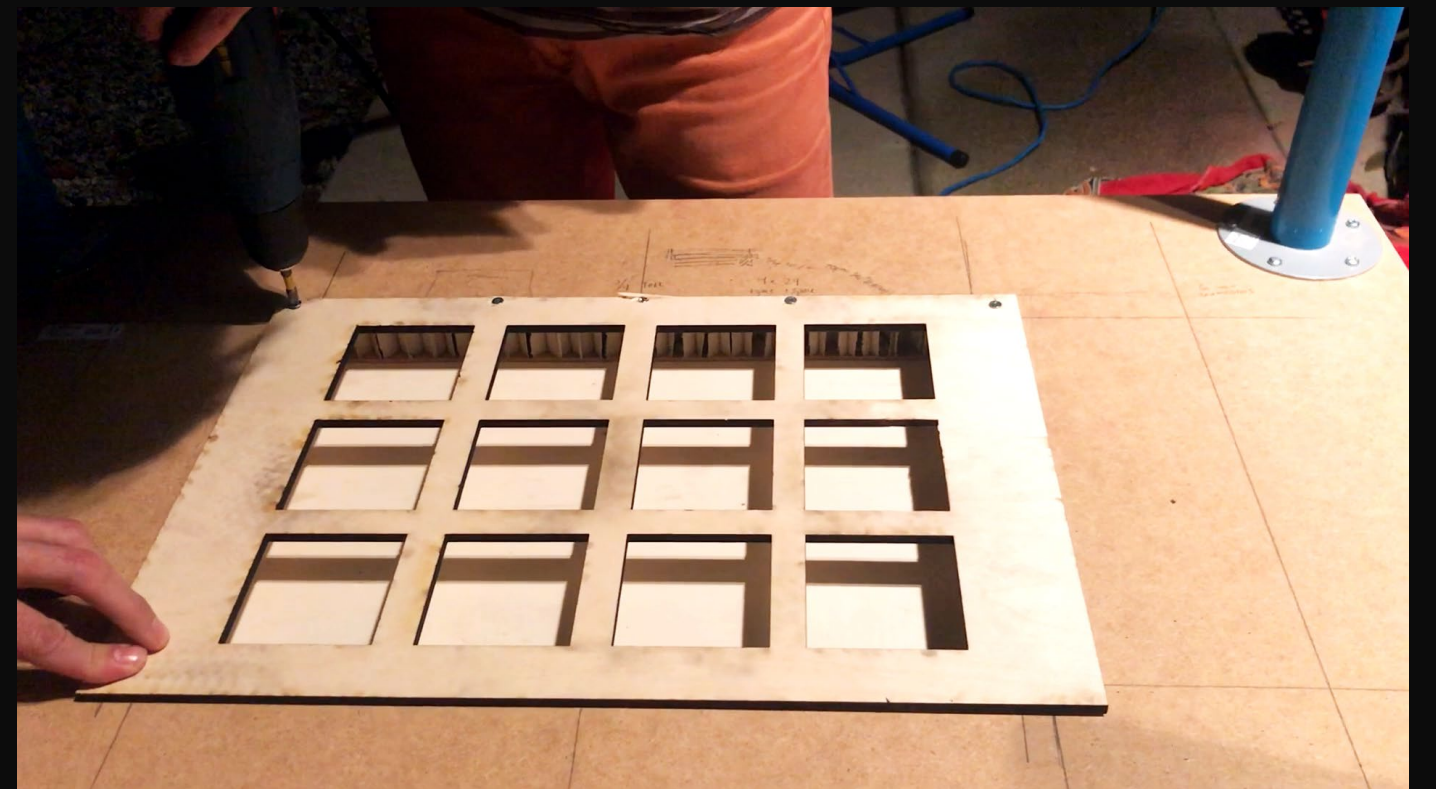
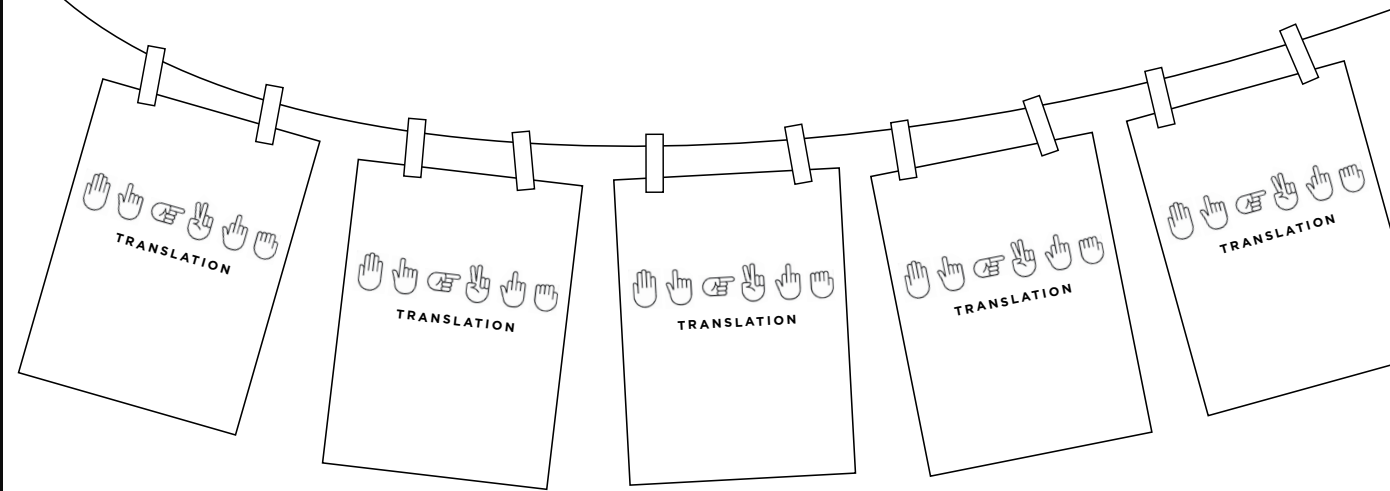


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## The Output



Construction of the table's grid. The stamps fit snugly in the bed's cut-outs to successfully ink the paper.



A.J. Hansen proudly presents "BOOM" poster before attaching it to the clothesline.



## Damon Krukowski

Interview: Research and Theory

Damon Krukowski is a musician, author and podcaster. He was part of the band Galaxie 500 in the 1980s '90s and currently performs with his wife in their duo, Damon and Naomi. He is the writer of *The New Analog*, which explores the switch from analog to digital audio, and its influence on our perceptions. He examines what it means to listen in our current landscape through *Ways of Hearing*, a six-part podcast with Radiotopia that turned into a book in 2019.

**D:** I have the same machine (referring to the Zoom mic on the table).

**A:** Don't you love it?

**D:** Yeah. I use my iPhone a lot too.

**A:** I have my iPhone on too, just as a backup. I'm super paranoid.

**D:** No, that's really smart because it fails. All digital things fail. It's the weirdest thing about digital, which I don't think I ever mentioned in either my projects, but how fragile it really is.

**A:** It's so fragile.

**D:** I don't know a single artist who hasn't lost material. And you know how digital things fail—once they go, there is no recovery. It's not like you can fast forward past that part. It just stops reading.

**A:** It's true. How did you get into music? I know that you played the drums and you had Galaxie 500...

**D:** Well my mother is a singer, which is in *Ways of Hearing*—well you heard the podcast. So James [Goggin] is turning the podcast into a physical book. I have a copy to show. (Draws book out of bag). I was just meeting with my editor. I can't leave it with you because he just brought me one.

**A:** Oh, that's so exciting. It looks very James.

**D:** It is very James. And it is made as sort of a response to *Ways of Seeing*, the book by John Berger. But there's a preface in here that I think will really interest you with your project.

**A:** (Looking at book) Oh, Emily Thompson.

**D:** Yes. Sound scholar. And she writes in here about complimentary forms—of having this book as an audio artifact and in print. And she makes this really brilliant point about the sound component to a book. So there are the sounds that you imagine and also the sounds around you wherever you are reading it. And then she says the irony is that while you're listening to the podcast, you don't hear any noise around you, right?

**A:** Right.

**D:** So here I am telling you how important that is, while stuffing your ears up and stopping you from hearing your environmental sounds. Whereas a book, you read and you're very aware of your environment, and it merges with you and you're in and you're out of it, but it's always available to just like we are right now.

We were worrying about where we were going to meet that would be quiet enough to record this, but you know a cafe has a level of noise right at the edge, where it threatens the recording sometimes. But not so much that you can't read in it. People are always reading in cafes. And so the ambient noise is of course acceptable or even a part of our reading experience. Whereas our audio experience is very particular when we're getting program material for audio.



View of the Harvard Art Museum's Courtyard—where Damon and I met to talk.

**D:** So I thought that was a fantastic thing. So [Emily Thompson] makes the case that the podcast and the book—there's no reason to choose between them—that they're actually two different experiences of the same content, but that you will fill in differently as a viewer or reader or an auditor. She's so good.

**A:** That's fascinating—I can't wait to read it. And does this contain basically the narrative that you delivered in your podcast?

**D:** It's word for word the script—I did not deviate. And so the point of the book is partly also made through that exact translation to the point where we used sound effects—instructions. And these are literally from the script. And then in the back I had the sound designer of the podcast add a glossary of those terms, because I also feel like this is a little bit instructional for people about how a podcast is made. It's partially continuing the meta quality to the podcast, which was intended to make you aware of how you were experiencing the sound more than most podcasts do.

**D:** And so to follow that through on the page, I wanted make you hyper aware as a reader that you are reading a script to a sound text, yet you're also reading a sound effect that's not in there. And if you turn it on, of course you're not going to see—I don't say "needle drop," but—

**A:** You can hear it.

**D:** Yes, but it's up to you to decide what that sound is, of course. And some of them will only be clear when you look at the script. Some of the songs that we used are identified in the script, and weren't identified on the podcast.

**A:** Right. Because you're not going to call it out. You're just going to play it.

**D:** Exactly. So you get different information from the two, which is a version of what Emily Thompson drew out in her comment on it. But that was already baked into the project from me and James. Then what I asked of James—and this relates to your project too—I handed him the podcast, the audio, and my script and said, "You have to now supply everything that the sound designer did to the script. Here's my script." And that's all I gave the sound designer too. As an audio version, I read it aloud, but he didn't have anything else, and he had to put in all of the sounds that made it an audio piece. Now we're losing all of his work. So now graphic design has to be the exact parallel for the sound design. But I didn't want to tell him how to do it. I wanted him to fill that role, so I just gave it to him as a problem.

**A:** That's so fascinating.

**D:** Yeah. So he did the image research—we collaborated a little, but mostly he did it, and the idea was to use image and text—what he has available to him on the page—to fill what the sound does. James is essentially doing the sound component.

**A:** I think it's so interesting, not just the meta way that you approached the podcast—but it's true. I'm sitting there with my noise-canceling headphones, listening to the podcast. I can hear every word very clearly. I'm sort of in this vacuum.

**D:** Absolutely. And I heartily approve of noise canceling headphones, by the way. You'll be so grateful as you get older. There's not only the damage to your hearing, but I think it distorts the program material. I think actually a lot of people aren't aware of how much they are slanting the program material just through sheer volume. You lose a whole part of the spectrum to ambient noise, and noise canceling headphones are preserving it way more. But yes, your point is so excellent. It makes it even more of a vacuum. You don't even have the interference of the sound outside your headphones.

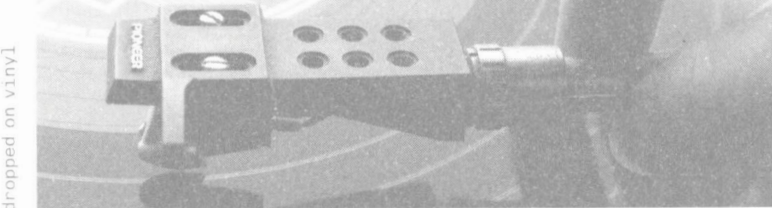
**A:** Right. Or your environment at all. But I think that's what's so fascinating about it, is because you're asking people to listen more carefully and pay attention to the sounds that are around them. So it's sort of like you have this vacuum and then you take it off and go about your day and you can be more aware of that.

Based on the acclaimed podcast featured by Radiotopia

Damon Krukowski

# Ways of Hearing

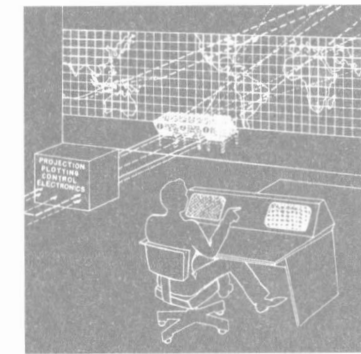
[SFX: Needle drop]



The sound of a needle dropped on vinyl

The first record I made was all analog. It wasn't a choice—that's just how it was done in the 80s. My friends and I lived in an all-analog world. There were no computers in our lives.

That didn't feel weird—it would have been weird if there had been. At the time, computers were something you saw on TV during a moonshot—you saw people sitting at computers at NASA Mission Control.



NASA Apollo Mission Control room, Johnson Space Center, Houston, 1965

[SFX: Apollo launch]

Making a record wasn't anything like a moonshot. It didn't use numbers. It didn't use data.

Damon's 2019 book *Ways of Hearing*, from his podcast of the same name by Radiotopia. Book design by James Goggin.

**D:** You know, it just occurred to me because you're saying it this way—there were a bunch of comments on my podcast when it was going out live on Radiotopia—well, there's no such thing as live in a podcast. Some people were complaining about the way my voice was recorded, that they were hearing my mouth sounds too much. And I've really been puzzled by this, but I think you just gave me the answer, which is maybe this might be flattering myself, but because I was making people hyper-aware of how they were hearing while they were listening to the podcast, maybe they became hyper-aware of the normal mouth sounds of a vocal recording.

**A:** I think that's true. I think that people then focus on the one thing that's giving them the signal and then they can obsess over the small details.

**D:** So I wonder if it was just that I had succeeded in getting people to focus more than usual on what they were hearing and what they were hearing was my voice. And then they were hearing my lips smack (both laugh).

**A:** I think that's a clear sign of success. Like you've done your job.

**D:** I never thought of that until this moment but I'm actually going to maybe incorporate that into my presentation of this book, because it was such a puzzle to me.

But that was the idea. It's a meant to be a meta project. People who are not students of form as you are—are not necessarily used to using their critical faculties at the same time that they take in information. That's basically graphic design in a nutshell. You've got to think about both the content and the form.

**A:** Right. Well I think the book format is so interesting. I'm thinking about a podcast as a book. I feel like there have been so many transitions throughout history in terms of how we read or how we see or listen. I'm thinking back to the 1950s when people had radios in their living rooms and would listen instead of watch television. Before TV became prevalent—people were together.

**D:** They listened together.

**A:** So that's almost like a reading experience as a group. And then thinking about how people also read books—physical books—which is more of a singular activity, but now with the transition to podcasts or audio books as increasingly popular—those books are translated differently and change the reading experience. So can listening also be reading? I think it can be... but it's different.

**D:** I agree. I hadn't thought about that. That's a great way to think back in time about contextualizing our own struggles with this. In a historical framework, reading of course has been—or is in other cultures and other moments—auditory as well. Like in the temple you read the Torah portion or you read the lesson for the day and that's where the book is not available to each individual. You read aloud—you read together—and going back where there was much more illiteracy. Only some were reading.

**A:** The stories were told.

**D:** The stories were told. But of course the Hasidic [Judaism] tradition of storytelling is so powerful with parables that weren't written down, or that were written down only by the subset that were to be the scholars. Where it's necessary to the community and to every family.

**A:** Where reading is like an elitist thing.

**D:** Right. Or in the Catholic church, where until the 60s, it was always in Latin and so nobody understood what was being said. But it's still reading. I mean, they were still reading the text and so the reception of the text was not only auditory, but pure sound because there was no comprehension.

**A:** Right. I think that reminds me of something that you wrote about, which is that when we speak, our voices say things that aren't necessarily spoken. So a whisper can mean something, or the intonation of your voice can do something that's different from the words that you're actually saying.

**D:** Exactly. And so that was the whole problem I handed to James, because I gave him the text without any intonation. I gave him the audio recording and was encouraging him to do things too. He did alter the type treatment—just sometimes. Here is a part where I speed up my voice and I slow down my voice. (Shows me the part of the book). I don't think he changed the typeface.

**A:** It looks like a condensed version. I like that a lot.

**D:** And then there are other places where he used spacing to indicate silence, because of course in the podcast I fall silent, and there's a silent beat. There's a space. And so these were small gestures to put in the things that are not on your page, because it's part of the point of the text. He was spare with it. And I think what he does for the reader is he calls your attention to the possibility without hitting you over the head with it over and over again.

John Cage has a book—I actually brought that book to James as an example to look at when we were first sketching out this project. It's his diary. Have you ever seen that one?

**A:** No.

**D:** It's called *How to Improve the World*. I think the subtitle is *You'll Only Make Matters Worse* (Amy laughs). Now I can't remember which way it started, but it's both a spoken and a written text, which is why I brought it to James to look at, and why it would interest you. On the page, Cage used chance operations to change the typeface. And it sometimes changes word by word. I think he was using an IBM Selectric, which had a ball. You could change the font, because the balls unlocked and screwed back in. Cage being Cage—pushed this and rolled the dice. I think it just rotated through the ones he had—and he changed color too, so it's in color and in different fonts. So anyway, I brought that to James, and the thought was that's going too far, because you're reading this text that you can't quite read the content without constantly being interrupted by the form. Which is part of Cage's interest.

I think he worried about the page because first he was a composer, so his music was written and never improvised—He always had scores for everything. So if you're a composer in the sense of a musician who begins at the page, you're forever dealing with that translation of sound to page, and back again. He edited a book in the 60s called *Notations* where he just wrote like a hundred people or two hundred composers and asked them for one page each of their scores. And then the book is nothing but page, page, page, page, page. And the point of it is that every single person was writing music differently. At that point in time, almost no one was using a proper score.



**D:** And the point was music and the page relate in so many different ways, and he was always interested in that exploration. So I think you were asking how I got into music, right? So the answer is not that way. Not through the page. I don't read music.

**A:** You don't?

**D:** No. I was taught as a child, but I didn't develop it. I'm a semi-literate musician. I can read a jazz chart, meaning I can read chord charts. I cannot read a score properly, but that was not my professional working life as a musician. As a musician, I've always worked by the ear, and I write music, but it doesn't mean written with my hand, meaning I write on an instrument or with my voice, and I memorize it and I share it with others. I make chord charts so that I can communicate some harmonic consistency to other musicians. But chord charts are used in jazz particularly, but they're not considered by trained musicians to be a true form of written music. So I come out of this oddly illiterate musical background.

Music, for me is purely a sound thing. I've never wrestled with the translation to the page, because I've had recording technology available to me from the get go. My music career started on cassettes that we could have at home. Galaxie 500 would record our rehearsals. That's how we would write music—we would record cassettes at home of ideas and then bring the cassettes into rehearsal and play them for each other. Then we would record our joint rehearsals on cassette, take home the cassette, listen to our joint rehearsal and refine the songs that way. The final version of song was when we went to the recording studio and fixed it to tape, but we never fixed it to the page. So our music is very audio-only, but shaped by cheap recording media.

So when my mom was learning music, audio recording was not cheap or easy to do at home. So she came up through a different process, and she reads music and knows how to communicate with musicians that way, yet she's the jazz musician—which is all improvisation. Her field is actually less dependent on written music. It's also much less dependent on recording, because jazz as a form developed pre-recording. And so she learned from other jazz musicians, from a practice to respond to what was happening in the room and to the tune—not to a recorded version.

**A:** Do you feel like you were really influenced by her?

**D:** Oh my god, yeah. I mean, she's a very audio person. My mom is constantly singing. She's constantly reminded of lyrics and constantly quoting lyrics. She's very verbal, too. So in that sort of old-fashioned oral way, there was a lot of wordplay. She was born in the 1930s. I don't know if it was peculiar to certain parts of the society in that era, but if you watch thirties movies, which I love—there's a lot of wordplay in them, and sometimes it's so fast that we can't get it. So ones I love, like Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers films—the throwaway lines and the repartee between them—it's incredibly quick and a lot of it depends on wordplay.

**D:** Then of course with musicals, they burst into song and you hear how consistent that is with the song. The song is all based on wordplay, too. So a lot of what's now called *Great American Song Book*, the American standards—which is the jazz songbook too—were pop songs of their day. And like pop songs today, they dealt with a lot of slang, a lot of double entendre. A lot of contextual response to other songs that people knew or to pop cultural artifacts—references to famous figures of the day. All of that is in the material. And I grew up with all of that from my mother very strongly.

So I don't write music exactly connected to that, although I feel like I've taken a few tricks of the trade, but I'm not like an Noll Cowher-type songwriter by any stretch. I will take a secondary meaning of a word and then build the lyric on the secondary meaning rather than the primary meaning. It might take a moment to hear which way I meant the phrase. Something like that.

**A:** It kind of reminds me of rap music, like the way that it can be really fast. And you're making cultural references while doing wordplay essentially.

**D:** Absolutely. And I think that the 30s *Songbook* comes out of very urban environments—very crowded environments, and mostly very poor environments. So then all those Jewish-American songwriters came out of the Lower East Side, and before that a lot were born in the ghetto in Europe. So there's actually a continuum with music that comes out of similar urban environments—a lot of hanging out on the street corner and bouncing jokes and insults—a wordplay back and forth. And that tradition in the African American community is very much in jazz, and it's also from the Jewish-American community, from a lot of the written songs that the jazz players then used and adapted. So that flexibility of morality and what it represents on the page—I think that's the influence from my mother most strongly.

**A:** So you say that you don't actually write music in terms of it being written out, right? But you are indeed a writer.

**D:** Right.

**A:** So then what's the relationship between those two things?

**D:** That's really something that I've really wrestled with my whole life, and I'm still confused by. And this project actually with the podcast is in part talking through that problem, because when I was in school, I didn't take music classes because I can't read or write music. I went to Harvard College, and I couldn't even be admitted to the music classes. They had a prerequisite test that I couldn't pass. At the time, Ethnomusicology wasn't really yet in the music department. It was more in anthropology, which I gravitated towards. So I studied social sciences as an undergrad, which gave me access to thinking about sound. I wasn't conscious of it as a subject for study, but I was conscious of stretching my interest off the page. As an undergrad, I did it through social theory. At Harvard it was called Social Studies.

**D:** I took poetry classes as my writing for my own development as an artist—a writer. Not music, because as I said I was frozen out of them anyway. So for music, I just played in bands, and that was truly extra-curricular. But then my writing was also forced to be extracurricular, because at the time Harvard had a policy where I was only allowed to take two one-semester credit classes for credit in making, in writing.

**A:** Really? There was no writing department?

**D:** No writing department. There's still no creative writing major. So I got into the best poetry class that Harvard had. The only senior faculty poetry professor they had was one—the Boston professor of language and rhetoric.

When I was an undergrad, they had Justin Seamus, and he was brand-new, and nobody yet knew how great a poet he was or how prestigious it would be to study with him. In my final meeting with him, he said, "There's an American poet." He told me, "There's an American poet that I think you might be interested in named John Ashbery." John Ashbery is now passed on, but he was the great poet of his generation. And [Seamus] said, "I think you'd do well to read him and I think you'll get a lot from that." I was interested in surrealism and all this. Seamus Heaney is very earthy—he comes out of the Yeats and greater British Isles, in touch with the land. He comes from a farming family, and was very proud of it.

John Ashbery loved Avant-garde music—loved French Avant-garde literature. Loved visual art. So anyway, Seamus sort of sent me off like, "You better go find some poetry that will speak to you better than I can." So my history with the page is kind of complex.

I came to Harvard and didn't put my interest in writing or music into my academic studies. Then I went to grad school in English literature. But that was because the professor I met through social theory studies who advised my undergraduate thesis was an English professor of American literature who was a Marxist. So I found him that way. I then went to grad school under his tutelage.

**A:** It's really interesting just hearing about your background in social studies and social theory, because I think one of the things that really stuck out to me in your podcast in particular was the idea of sound being a place for shared experiences. I'm interested in hearing you talk more about that. How can sound bring shared experiences even given the context of our current digital age?

**D:** Exactly. That really gets to the heart of what motivated me to do the podcast in the first place. I've never really thought self-consciously about tracing that through my whole career and background. But you're right, because it is about shared experience, and of course that's what I've always loved about playing music, and what was so distinct from my academic studies, and ultimately even from my interest in poetry, because poetry remains a very solitary affair. The poetry reading is an enormously embarrassing and painful social affair. It is not a comfortable performative experience. My poetry life is very entwined with sound, but usually through music.

**A:** Why do you think that is?

**D:** I don't know, I guess it came out of a music and social theory. The awkwardness of a poetry reading has been painful to me from the start—and still is. Poets who can read aloud are amazing, but they are so few and far between because it's not actually part of the tradition. The reading itself, at least in the Anglo-American tradition—is painfully awkward. At the same time, I've always taken great pleasure and delight in music and in performance, and in what that means for the audience and for the performer, especially because I was taken to all these jazz shows as a child. The jazz performance, for me, is in a small club where you meet the musicians. A jazz club has no backstage, but there are bars. When you're between sets, the musicians are sitting with you in the audience or at the bar, and they're listening to the other musicians or talking. It's a social event.

**D:** It comes out of a non-proscenium tradition. It comes out of brothels and bars—it does not come out of theatrical performance. But I think that's just natural to me—that performer and audience exchange that participate in the same space. Which is a lot of my podcast—acknowledging the shared quality of the spaces that we share through audio, and not pretending that they're otherwise. There's a lot of pretending that goes on in any theatrical presentation—a suspension of disbelief, or a lending of authority. But it's pretend, right? I mean, come on. You know, we're in the same space and we're all people, so let's deal with that too. And so that's very natural to me.

And then with my own career as a musician, I found that in indie rock—underground rock—experimental music of a kind, which at the time when I came up as a musician was only happening in similar spaces to where I had experienced jazz with my mom, which was bars. They weren't brothels, but a lot of them were drug fronts. A lot of places were fronts, because that was the only way that they could stay open and they had music because it didn't matter.

**A:** It was part of the scene too, right?

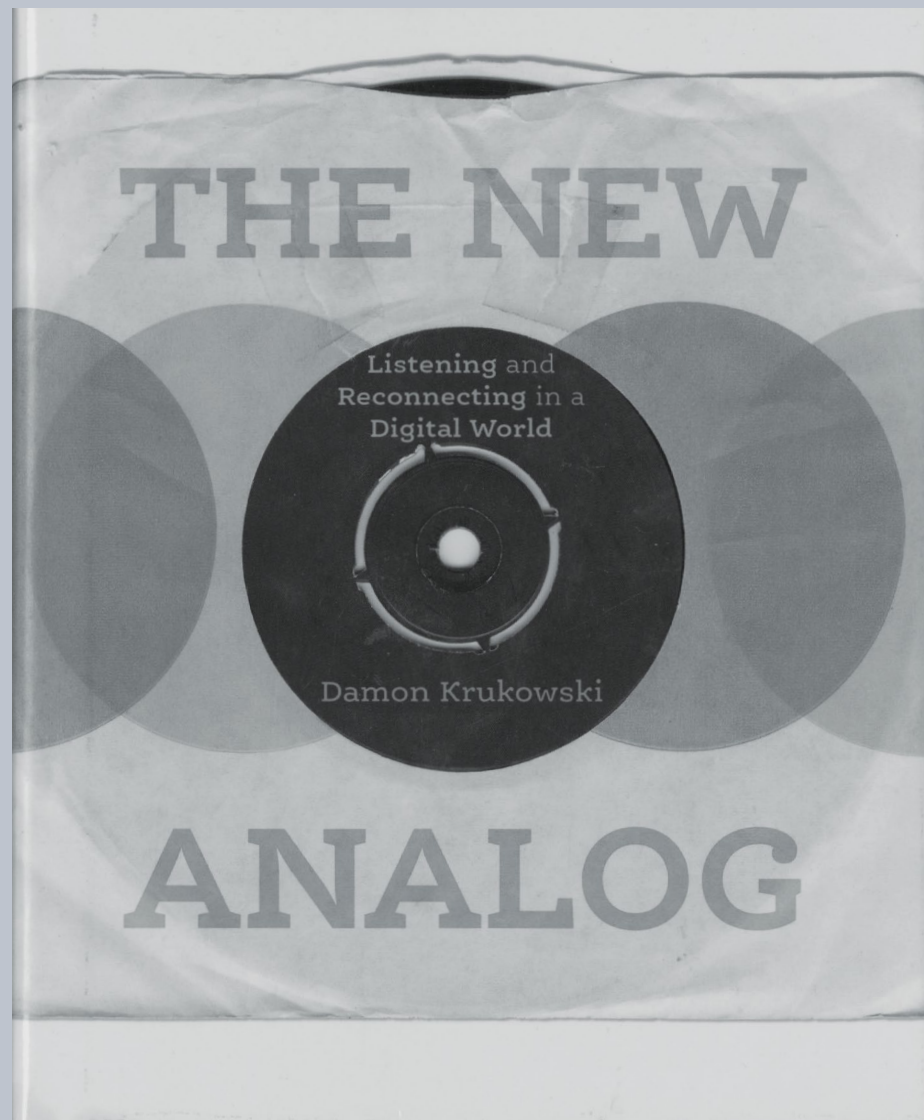
**D:** Yeah. And also as an excuse or money laundering—there's so many reasons why bands fit into illicit activities. The rock world that we were a part of, and still are, more or less, happened in marginal spaces. That felt very familiar to me. And the audience were all other musicians—they were also in bands, struggling. You would go to see each other's shows.

And then there are a couple of fans who are crazy for the whole genre. They come out to every show, and you know them as well as you know the other musicians. So I found a very comfortable sound world for myself, which was this very self-taught indie rock world. It proved to be this wonderful means of exchange—for getting outside town. There was a community that existed in every town. Then we could make connections with other towns, and lo and behold, we could travel and meet people from other bands, and they traveled here. And then we got signed to a label and we went to Europe, and then we were wandering all over Europe doing the same thing.

**D:** But it's a social sound world, based on not only on live music, but on the exchange of recordings. So we started trading records with people. The value of pressing a single was also that you could trade it to other musicians for theirs. That was part of it.

**A:** An exchange.

**D:** And when we first had a record, it was all about trading the records. So our record collection blossomed through making records. It's a social engagement. And then, of course, we weren't using headphones. So the whole digital thing is a real disruption to that economy of exchange. But not only the financial economy of it; it disrupted the non-financial means of exchange. And this goes back to my interest in social theory. When I was an undergrad, I dabbled in anthropology and considered going to grad school in anthropology because it explained so much to me about the world in that I was participating in—things like gift exchange. And so the whole idea of music being a world of Online, non-financial, but also not person-to-person exchange, and on headphones rather than speakers—is totally alien. So that's why I sort of delved into my book *The New Analog* trying to question that.



Damon's 2018 book *The New Analog: Listening and Reconnecting in a Digital World*

**A:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Well, I mean it's sort of nostalgic when you think about the joy of getting or making a mixed tape for somebody.

**D:** Oh, absolutely. Which we participate in whole-heartedly.

**A:** Whereas that is not really something that people would do anymore, when you can just get onto Spotify and get those songs that you want.

**D:** Right. I mean, people do make playlists, but of course the sharing that we do Online is not direct person-to-person. Even email is dying—at least for a generation, because everyone's so used to sharing in this other sense of sharing at large. Even if it's targeted at one person, there's the potential that it's more publicly shareable.

**A:** It seems like it's more about projecting than exchanging.

**D:** I think that's well put, because in social media we are projecting, and there's that potential quite literally of the scattering of the information can be seen from more angles and from more places. Private communication is at a premium, and even our private communications, so-called, are under surveillance, so they're not really private. So that's the world we came into. And it was a very, very private world of the page and a very public world of sound. And then it all flipped, you know what I mean?

**A:** Yeah. I never thought about it that way.

**D:** Sound is very private at the moment. We experience on headphones, we experience alone, on our Online accounts. So by in large, it's this weirdly private thing. And I watched this behavior at shows—social behavior at live shows has changed drastically.

**A:** How so?

**D:** Well, my generation is very used to going to shows, and socializing as really the reason for why you go to the show, and experiencing it in this very public way. And when you bring cell phones into the venues, everybody is recording, and photographing, and texting and sharing the experience with people who are not there. I often will see people at shows who stay alone. They're alone at the show, and they don't seem anxious about it, whereas it used to be an anxious position to be alone at a show. I think people didn't go to shows alone, or if you went alone, you quickly tried to join a social group of some kind, or at least look like you were.

**A:** Or meet somebody, who is also alone.

**D:** Exactly. And now I see people totally comfortable just standing there all alone. And I see them leave alone at the end of the night. That's not what used to happen. It was like people who came alone left with someone, and that was largely why clubs were busy (laughs). You don't see that happening as much visually, anyway. Or maybe they're making arrangements, but they're texting who they're leaving with and I'm not even witnessing it.

**A:** Or maybe they're texting someone who's not there, who they're going to meet up with afterward.

**D:** Right, so they're having a social thing, but it's not social in the room—it's still very individual. And then from the stage, I can tell you that there's a difference in a crowd that is communicating with people outside the room and a crowd that's not. And you feel it from the stage very powerfully because it's very disturbing to see people's faces lit up by the glow of the screen. You see it really clearly from the stage.

**A:** So you see their faces.

**D:** Yes. And otherwise you don't see faces from the stage—you see only the front row. Now you see faces lit up, and you see them looking down—not at you. And there's a whole other kind of communication going on, but you don't see them. But here's the plus for a quiet band like us: audiences are much more quiet than they used to be. They used to gab, and it was very hard for a band like ours, who were very quiet, to deal with a busy crowd. And now it's fine because everybody's quiet—they're talking, but they're talking through their phones.

So we can perform our quietest material now with some more confidence than we used to. But I don't feel more confident that we have any more attention than we used to from the audience. It's harder to gauge the attention. It used to be when the crowd fell silent, you knew you had them, but now there's no telling because the crowd can be silent and no one can be listening to you. It's another one of those shifts from the technology.

**A:** But then at the same time, you mentioned the fact that people would go to shows for the social experience. But if they're not going for that anymore, then maybe it's fair to say you can be confident that they're there for the music.



Damon (left) posing with Galaxie 500 bandmates

**D:** For the music, yes—that's absolutely true. And not only that, but we can find more of our fans than we used to be able to. It doesn't mean we can get them to come out to a show, but we can locate them and communicate with them. And that's amazing. And that used to take so much more wasted energy.

Now we can really communicate in a very targeted way; we all operate as more niche targeting businesses. And it is true—people do come out, and they're more prepared for what they're going to get for better and worse. Because now we have this problem where we can't play exactly the same show night after night anymore, which we used to do more easily, because people have seen it on YouTube. I mean, we're not that type of band, but some bands we know practice their patter between the songs, and would do the same show every night. And if you have seen that on YouTube and then you go out, it can be painful; it can be almost awkward—back to a poetry reading—if you see the same supposedly offhand remark made between two songs that was made the night before. It's off-putting, you know.

**A:** Right. Well I think then it reveals the fakeness of it that you were talking about, right? The band or performer becomes the artist with a capital 'A' and you are the little people in the audience.

**D:** Precisely. Whereas a good performer will always make you feel like you're both in the moment together, and even though it is rehearsed—disguises that effectively. It's changed a lot about the social aspects of performance and of sound. So that was a lot of what motivated my book for sure. I've lived through this change, and I got to document it in some way. Every generation moves through changes, but this is the one I happened to have lived through. I happen to have lived through technological change in my own medium, which doesn't always happen, you know?

**A:** Yeah, that's true.

**D:** You might live through some development of it, but you don't necessarily live through a paradigm shift in your own field. And I did. I still am. So that was why I wrote the book. And then the background in social theory enters into the book. And once I'm sitting down to write non-fiction, I fall back on my so-called training. I did not get my PHD in the end, but I could have.

**A:** What about your master's thesis?

**D:** I didn't have one. We didn't have a master's thesis at Harvard. I wrote an undergrad thesis with my advisor, which was about Thoreau—but not just Thoreau—it was about various types of popular literature that I felt that Thoreau was either drawing on or paralleled from the 1850s. It was slave narratives of escape, which were from mostly by illiterate ex-slaves. And also Puritan narratives of captivity, which is another version of that story, but by white settlers captured by the Indians. And journals of Western treks across the plains. I thought that *Walden* drew on all these forms of narratives, and then I added another oral quality to it.

**D:** There was this derelict trailer park across the street from Walden pond called Walden Breezes. And like a good, young leftist, I had a talk-to-the-people kind of attitude, as a budding amateur anthropologist—and knocked on all the doors to see if anyone would sit down with me for interviews about their life living across the pond from Walden. Only one man would. And so I sat down for many long interviews with him and recorded them, like you’re doing with me. That was an element of my thesis, too. In the end the thesis was a real mess, because I didn’t know what to do with all these voices—but it was voices. It’s essentially a podcast. It was all about the road as a kind of a living metaphor.

**A:** It seems like when you’re talking about your thesis, you have all these people in different locations, right? Or maybe that were traveling or leaving their pond for another pond.

**D:** Absolutely.

**A:** I think that really pairs in an interesting way with sound, because sound is something that helps you locate. You talk about how our relationship to time has changed because of the way that sound has changed. Do you think it also changes the way that we have a relationship with location?

**D:** Yeah, that’s a beautiful question. And I’m also thinking now that I’ve gone through this narrative with you—which I’ve never thought about in relation to my current project—how connected that was. One of the main things about *Walden*—it’s a diary of one year at the pond. You go through the seasons with him. But the thing is that he wrote it over two years. The primary factor about that book is that it’s a literary sleight of hand, where you’re reading one year that seems to be unified in time as you go through the book—spring, summer.

**A:** But it’s two.

**D:** It’s two, and he puts the dates at the end of the book, so he makes you hyper-aware that it was two years, so you have an entire missing year, or a year collapsed onto the other year. Not only that, but it was written years later from notes that he kept at the pond. It’s a constructed literary artifact based on time that has a presumption of continuity and wholeness. It’s actually a construct, and he shows you his hand, and it has a lot of sound in it too. That’s why Cage loved Thoreau. Cage wrote a beautiful piece called *Mureau*, which is ‘Music Thereau’ combined—the two words squished together. He wrote by going through those journals and looking for all the descriptions of sound in them. Cage cut those together and made a sound poem. Thoreau, without recording technology, wrote down the sounds of the birds. He wrote down the sound of the ice cracking—he wrote down all these sounds as part of his natural observations.

Nineteenth century time was a very different thing than twentieth century time. And when I was very immersed in American renaissance literature, I was very hyper-aware of that, and thinking about our postindustrial time versus the time of Melville and Hawthorne and Thoreau—Thoreau being the most modern to me of them because

of his engagement with the railroad and of this kind of speed that was coming in. It’s still very early industrial times—pre-Civil War—and America doesn’t industrialize really only until during and after the war. So they’re still writing out of an agrarian sense of time. Cambridge was a day from Concord, Massachusetts, but for me it was fifteen minutes in a car. Then there were already train tracks, and Thoreau was aware of the difference between taking the carriage or a horse from Concord to Cambridge and now taking the train.

He writes that in *Walden*. Even though he’s writing a book of natural observation at a pond of the natural order of time, he’s also aware of the speeding up and compression of it through the railroad, and of the expansion of it through the artifice of writing two years into one. He can expand and contract time through the book as he chooses, even though the book is literally of natural observation that happens in its own time frame. It was all these layers of time.

Pet theory of mine is that technology actually follows our imagination, not the other way around. James Joyce invented hypertext, or rather hypertext was invented because of Joyce. The engineers were exposed to the ideas that came out of modernism, that then they found a technological expression of what had been imagined before it could be done. If you look at the manuscript for *Ulysses* or *Finnegan’s Wake*, it’s all literally cut and pasted together. Then when we got computers and Microsoft Word, we can cut and paste—but why do we even call it cut and paste? Because James Joyce cut and paste literally, and because the generation of engineers who invented the software tools, even if they weren’t Joycean scholars or modernist fanatics exposed to the ideas that were then embedded in the culture in the time—in the zeitgeist that came from modernism.

The Avant-garde is Avant-garde, partly, I believe, because it precedes the technology that it is imagining. I’m not very into science fiction, but of course people are interested in that also come up with similar kinds of ideas. Jules Verne describes the submarine before there’s a submarine. And so the submarine is invented after Captain Nemo is imagined, right? *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* is written when it’s not possible to have a submarine. Why are submarines invented? Because Jules Verne wrote a very popular novel about them, which that generation of children imagined.

I do believe in that power of art and imagination, and I feel like a lot of the analog Avant-guard that I was exposed to growing up—pre-digital—anticipates a lot of digital tools. But then of course it’s perverted by the digital tools in a particular way. Then you get this struggle—and I think this is generational—of, wait a minute, we imagined the technology and now you’re misusing it, right? It’s not usually put those terms, but the misuse is put in those terms. You’re abusing what we didn’t even have—we had to cut and paste our text. And now you’re just plagiarizing! (Both laugh.) But that’s it. That’s not a healthy or interesting way to look at it.

(Museum guard: Sorry to interrupt)

**D:** We have to go, but we can continue talking. But I think that the more interesting way to phrase that is wait a minute, I have an imaginative view of this technology that doesn't quite fully match the technology itself. Let's make use of that gap. Let's make use of the gap between James Joyce and blogging, because that's a useful gap, because it goes both ways. You can have insight into Joyce through the experience of technology, and you can let Joyce influence your use of the technology.

It's like a dialogue with the past. And that, to me, is the more healthy version of having some perspective of the past. I was always interested in history and always interested in the past. And then, lo and behold, I got older, so now I actually have some knowledge to impart from the past—the recent past. That was the attempt of the book.

**A:** I think you were very successful in that. I mean, the book was hugely influential for me, and I think has provided a really interesting context to talk about for my thesis personally.

**D:** That's so great to hear. I really hope you'll share your thesis with me.

**A:** I will, absolutely. And it's actually so cool because at least in my writing so far—my preliminary writing—I've been referencing some of your writing, but now to be able to have an actual dialogue changes that page space into live, recorded space—

**D:** Yes. And a social space, absolutely. An exchange. I mean exchange I think is the thing. But you can have exchange with pure text, as you know. And you can have exchange with the past or with the dead. And I think we do all the time. And again, that's a very analog/digital question. I mean maybe digital and digital death are something to think about. I don't know if you've read this book yet, but Jonathan Stern wrote a book called *The Audible Past*. But what he writes about is the Victorian death culture—and the way that earlier recording technology was used in relation to Victorian interest in death and dying.

**A:** It's incredible. And that's something that's so amazing about recording technology—that you can capture those stories from people who will one day pass. Just like we all will.

**D:** Exactly. And Jonathan Stern writes about how that was immediately what people seized on. And that was the fascination. So now, it's this whole exchange of using technology across time to break that barrier. But also I think it's not a barrier. It's a constant exchange, and we just need to need to think a little harder about how digital has altered that exchange. Because it is altering it. Chronology is so confusing.

**A:** It's true. Of course everything shifts, but things go through ebbs and flows and rounds of things, and there's rejection and then change, and then rejection of that. Which goes back to the original in some capacity. So I'm really fascinated to see where it goes.

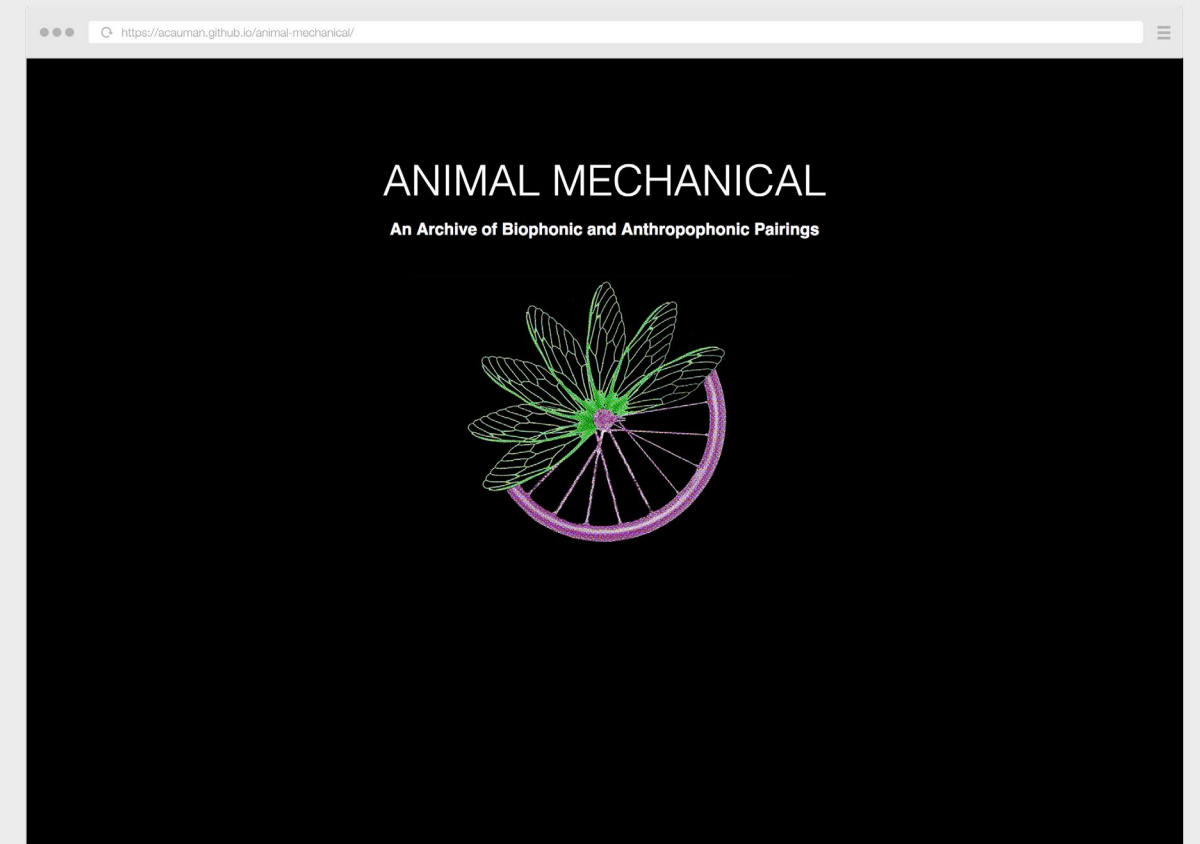
**D:** Oh me too. Definitely.

# BOOST

# Animal Mechanical

An animated homepage invites viewers to explore the collection.

Website



BOOST  
123

## Amplifying Awareness

123

### Cinematic Storytelling

Sharing a narrative with others, either in a social or cultural context, via motion picture. Motion pictures appear to be in continuous motion, but are actually an optical illusion caused by a rapid series of still frames put together.

### Environment

The natural world, either wholly or within a particular geographic area, especially in its relationship to the human impact in that area. It can also refer to the surroundings or habitat in which a person, animal or plant lives or occupies.

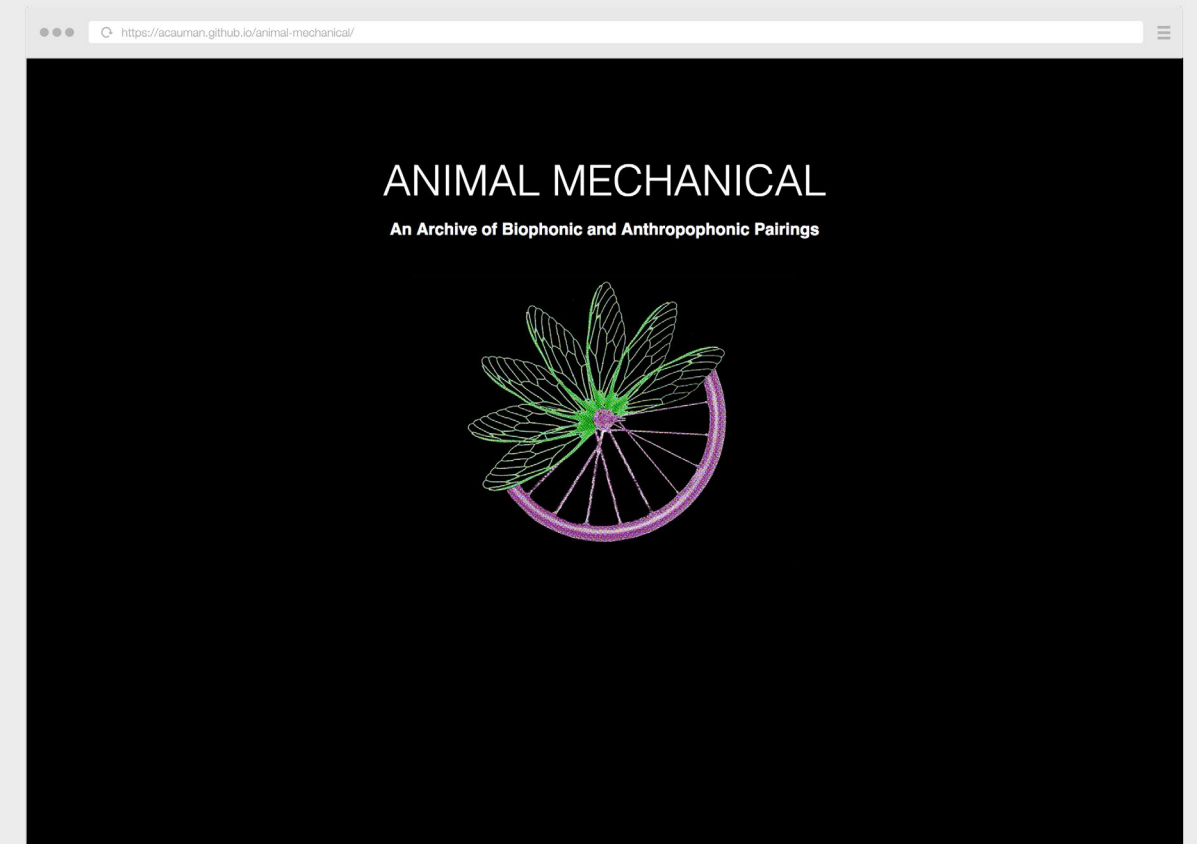
### Volume

How loud or soft a sound is perceived, determined by the amplitude of a sound wave. The bigger the amplitude, the louder the sound. Volume is measured in decibels. It is also used to describe the amount of space occupied in three dimensions (length, width, height).

## Animal Mechanical

Website

An animated homepage invites viewers to explore the collection.



Sometimes we all need a little boost. Stepstools work for me. My father used to sit me on top of his shoulders as a child. The elevation removed me from the throng of legs, elbows and handbags at my level and allowed me to see further into the distance.

To boost is the impetus to take notice. This body of work uses cinematic storytelling to conjure emotion and extend reciprocity with the natural world. When interviewing Janet Cardiff, she stated that we understand the environment via the senses. I agree with this. I am committed to what environmental activist and broadcaster David Suzuki refers to as “field of meaning.” He claims, “If we can see (as we once saw very well) that our conversation with the planet is reciprocal and mutually creative, then we cannot help but walk carefully in that field of meaning.”<sup>1</sup>

Using a blending of documentary work with fiction and sensory experiences, my work amplifies attention to offer various points of entry to complex

issues... Composing these fictional narratives exposes the imagination to alternate modes of reality, which boost reflective awareness. Documentary filmmaker Errol Morris asserts that believing is seeing, and not the other way around—our assumptions and beliefs affect how we perceive evidence, however ‘real’ that evidence may be. The documentary photograph, he says, “brings time forward, but also compresses it, collapses it into one moment. It is the idea that the photograph captures that endures.”<sup>2</sup> I create illusive films and sound pieces that blur or confound understanding of what is deemed ‘real,’ so viewers have to do a double take.

The work considers volume without being loud. With varying levels of visual and auditory intensity, I create a depth register that invites contemplation and multiple points of view. Audio generates varying moodscapes. It is a way of subtly occupying the subconscious to generate waves of impact.

<sup>1</sup>

David Suzuki with Amanda McConnell, *The Sacred Balance—Rediscovering Our Place in Nature*. Vancouver/Toronto: Greystone Books, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>

Errol Morris, *Believing is Seeing: Observations on the Mysteries of Photography*. New York: Penguin Press, 2011. (185).



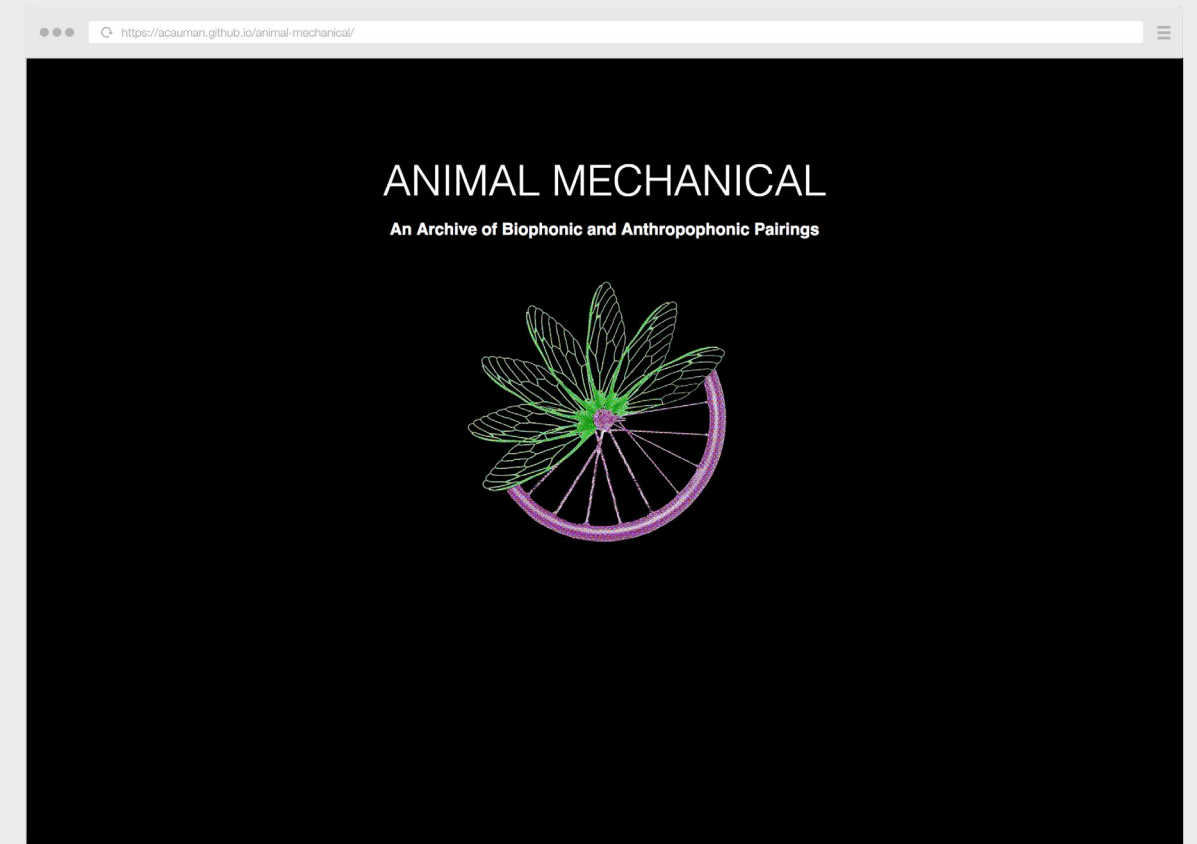
“In the persuasive immediacy of our visual culture, we tend to forget that our visual surroundings are imbedded in a vibrating field of acoustical energy—a field that doesn’t leave us when we close our eyes.”

—MICHAEL STOCKER

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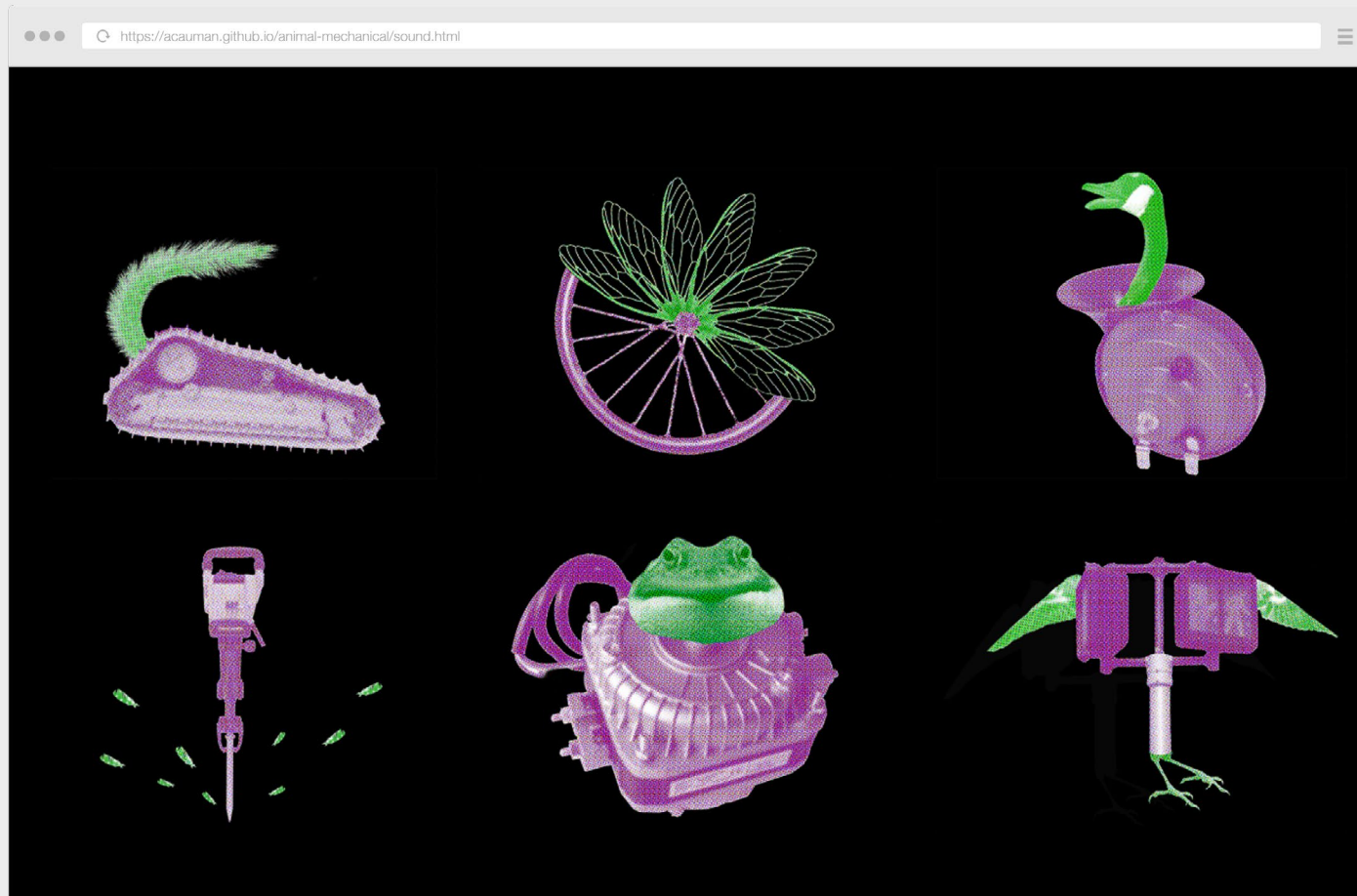
Website

Special thanks to Marie Otsuka for programming assistance

*Animal Mechanical* is a website that explores the relationship between biophonic (animal-generated) and anthropophonic (human-generated) sounds. The website lives as an interactive specimen archive of juxtaposed image and sound sequences.

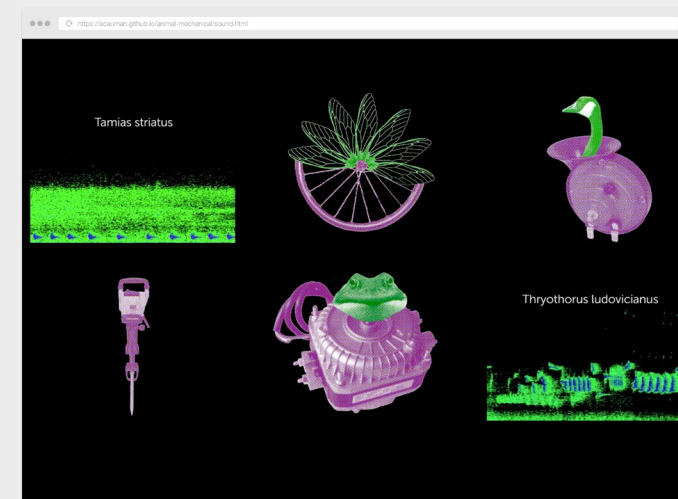
This project began with an investigation into soundscape ecology—the study of the relationship between various natural and human-generated sounds, and how they affect one another. I was particularly influenced by the work of soundscape ecologist Bernie Krause, who records soundscapes over long periods of time to identify ecological changes in the area.

Collaged animated GIFs reveal different sound pairings through a series of clicks. You can interact with each pairing individually, or create a new compositional soundscape of your own. While this website speaks to the conventions of specimen archives, it touches upon current issues surrounding the erasure of natural sounds in the environment due to human impact. At the same time, this project aims to provoke curiosity and dialogue through the lens of weirdness and humor.

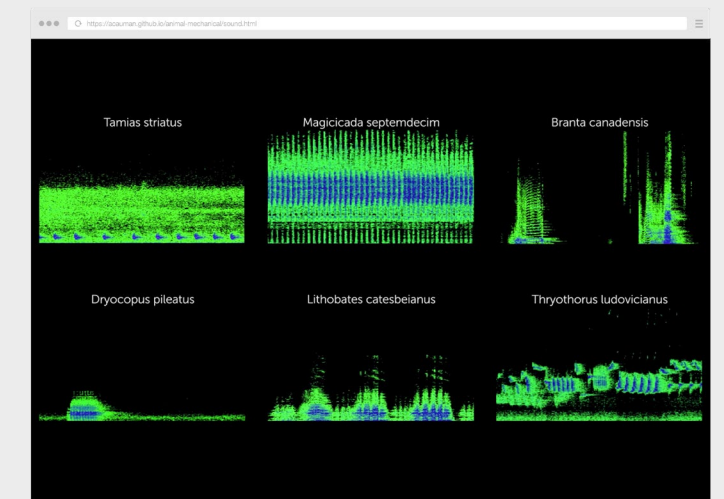


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Viewers may click on the gifs to reveal sounds pairings. The green and blue audio visuals indicate the natural sounds.



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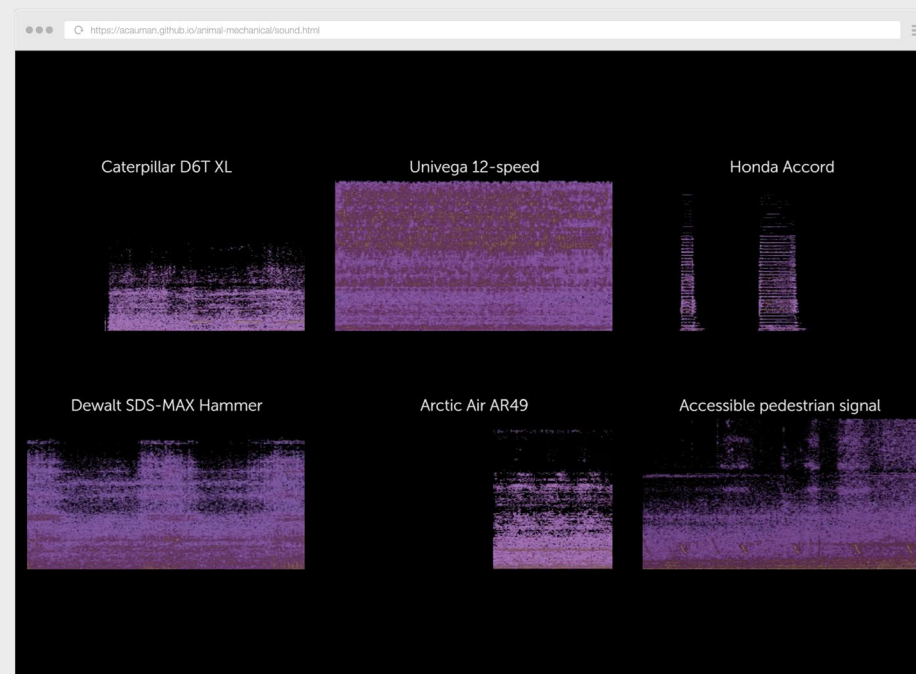
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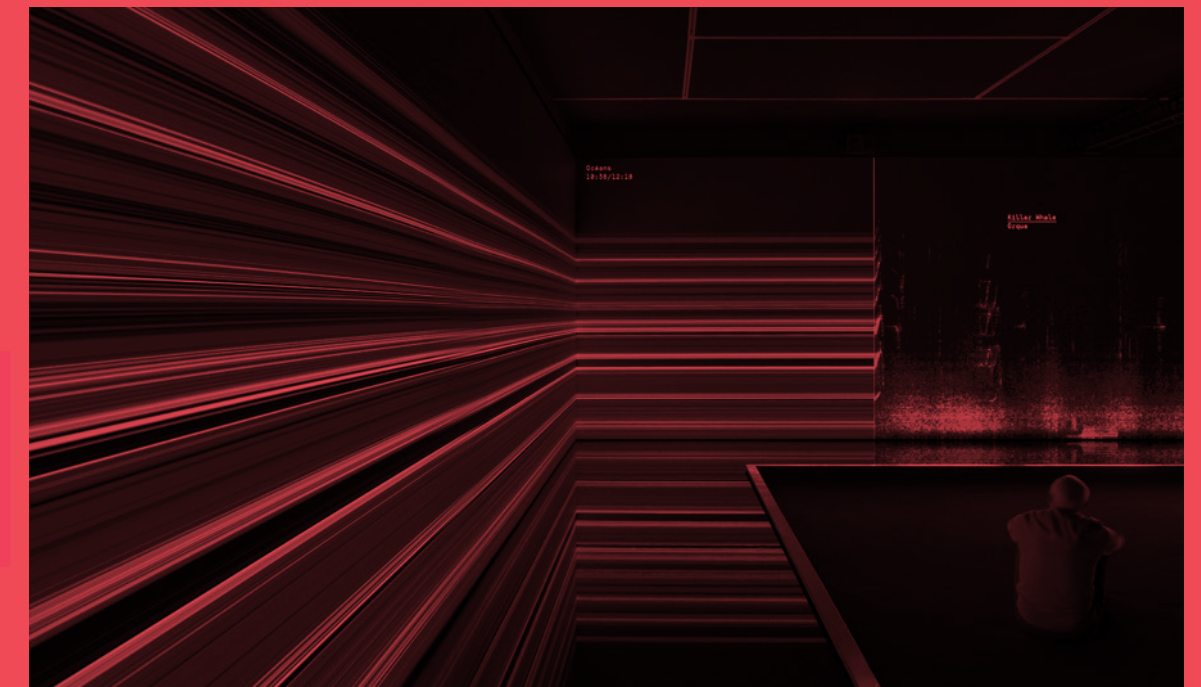
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Purple and yellow audio visuals indicate the human-generated sounds. Viewers can create their own composition of sound and image.



“In the persuasive immediacy of our visual culture, we tend to forget that our visual surroundings are imbedded in a vibrating field of acoustical energy—a field that doesn’t leave us when we close our eyes.”

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*The Great Animal Orchestra*, a sound and visual installation by soundscape ecologist Bernie Krause at the FondationCartier in Paris, France, 2016. Krause studies the same environmental

locations over long periods of time and records the soundscapes. The disappearance of natural sounds over time indicates the impact of human activity that may not be visibly noticeable.

Inspiration

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Special thanks to Marie Otsuka for programming assistance

*Animal Mechanical* is a website that explores the relationship between biophonic (animal-generated) and anthropophonic (human-generated) sounds. The website lives as an interactive specimen archive of juxtaposed image and sound sequences.

This project began with an investigation into soundscape ecology—the study of the relationship between various natural and human-generated sounds, and how they affect one another. I was particularly influenced by the work of soundscape ecologist Bernie Krause, who records soundscapes over long periods of time to identify ecological changes in the area.

Collaged animated GIFs reveal different sound pairings through a series of clicks. You can interact with each pairing individually, or create a new compositional soundscape of your own. While this website speaks to the conventions of specimen archives, it touches upon current issues surrounding the erasure of natural sounds in the environment due to human impact. At the same time, this project aims to provoke curiosity and dialogue through the lens of weirdness and humor.

## Inspiration

George Michelsen Foy's *Zero Decibels: The Quest for Absolute Silence* follows the author's attempts to find a place of solitude and silence devoid of human-made sound. Through his research, Foy discovers that he needs to change his criteria for the study, as no place existed—even in the most remote corners of the planet—for longer than fifteen minutes.

ZERO  
DECIBELS  
THE  
QUEST  
FOR  
ABSOLUTE  
SILENCE  
GEORGE  
MICHELSEN  
FOY

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Animal Mechanical

“Volume, as distinct from noise, draws our attention to our bodies, alerting us to the phenomena of sound entering the body, slipping into our mouths, our nostrils and our ears. It gets inside us, and when played loudly, it massages and rumbles our internal organs.”

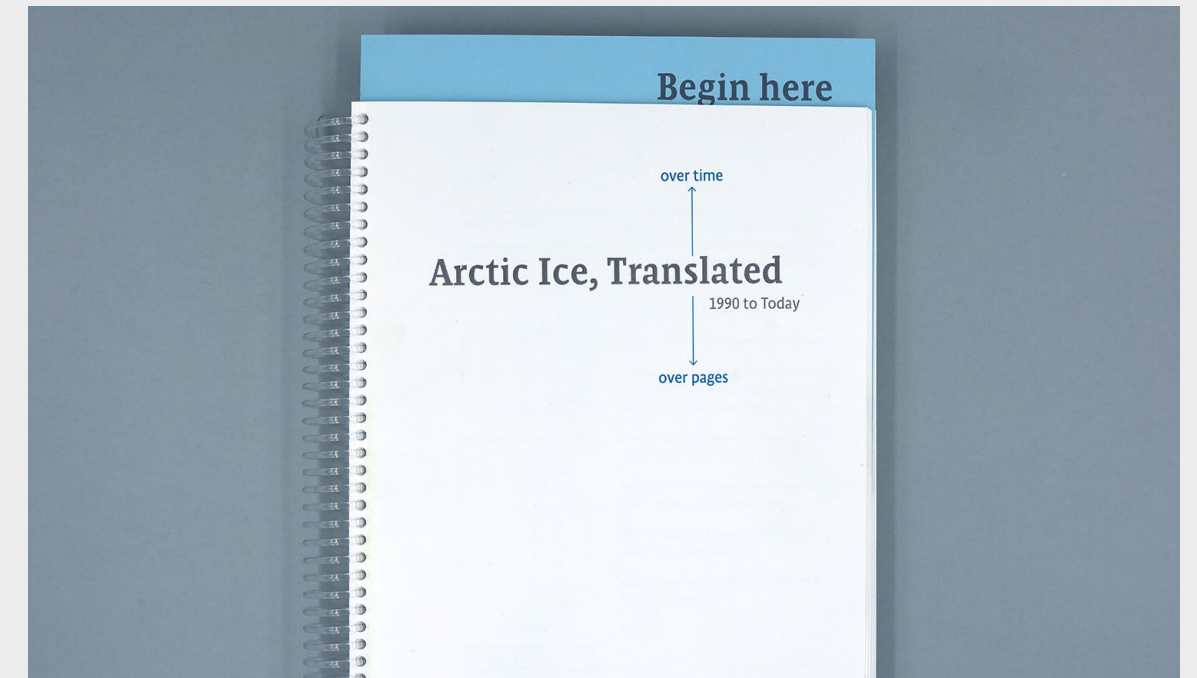
—CALEB KELLY

128

## Arctic Ice, Translated

Book, 7.5 x 9", 229 pages, with accompanying audio track

A tabbed blue page in the middle of the book indicates where to begin reading and listening.



BOOST

129

## Arctic Ice, Translated

Book, 7.5 x 9", 229 pages, with accompanying audio track

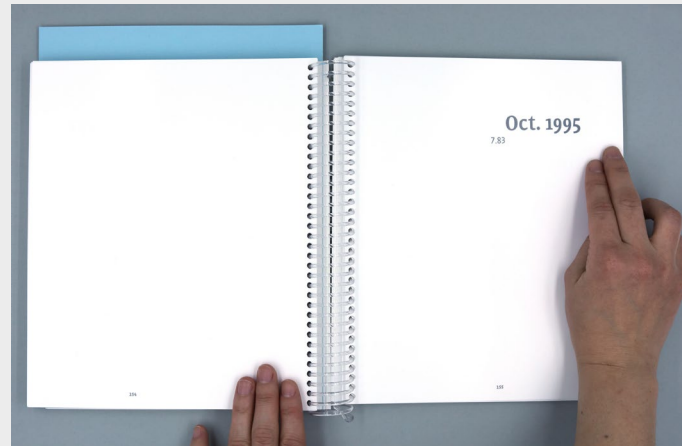
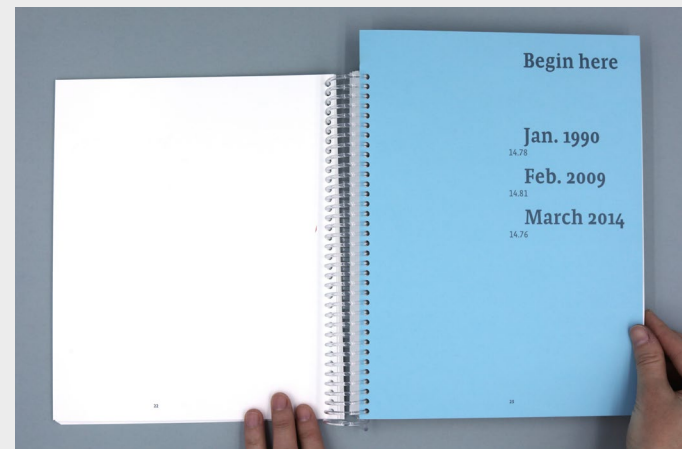
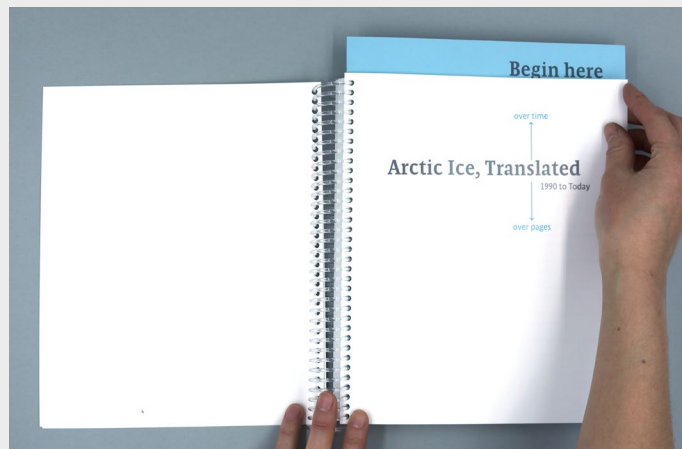
Can you learn sound? How can sound serve as instruction without using words? Before landing on the content for *Arctic Ice, Translated*, June Yoon and I created a choreography in space, determined by sound. Recorded, non-verbal *bleeps*, *bloops* and *grrrrs* stand in for directions to the performers. One sound represents the instruction to walk forward, another the instruction to turn right, and so on. We perform the dance for a camera.

The physical room-space then translates to a book-space. In the fall of 2018, I took a Climate Change class from Peter Stempel, who teaches artists hard science. Stempel explains the presence of Ice Ages in the past and those that will inevitably come in the future. He notes the ebbs and flows of seasonal variation versus long-term change to the planet. We hear a lot about how the

ice in the northern and southern poles is melting. But we don't hear much about how it really works over time. During warmer months ice melts. During cooler months it refreezes. But the amount of refreezing just isn't enough. A look at a longer period of time captures the trend of losing ice.

*Arctic Ice, Translated* uses the form of a book as data visualization. It accounts for the amount of arctic ice between 1990 and the present day. Each page stands for an increment of ice extent in the northern hemisphere. The accompanying audio track contains sounds of ice crunching and water dripping. These stand for instructions to move forward or backward in the book. When you hear the water drip, you move forward one page, indicating ice loss. When you hear the ice crunch, you move backward

129

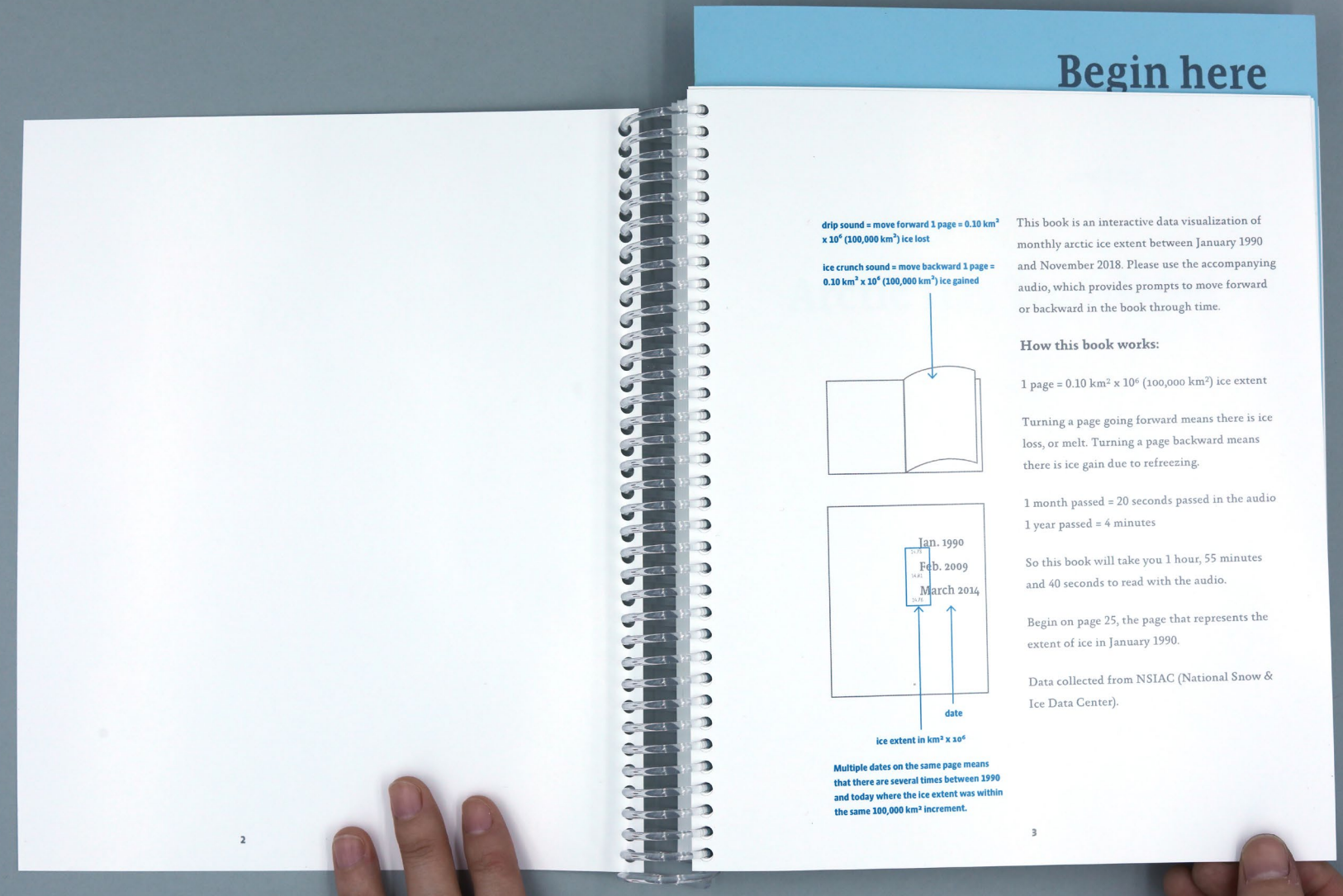


Each page represents a volume of ice loss or gain in time.

Opposite: The beginning of the book provides instructions on how it works.

130

Arctic Ice, Translated



130

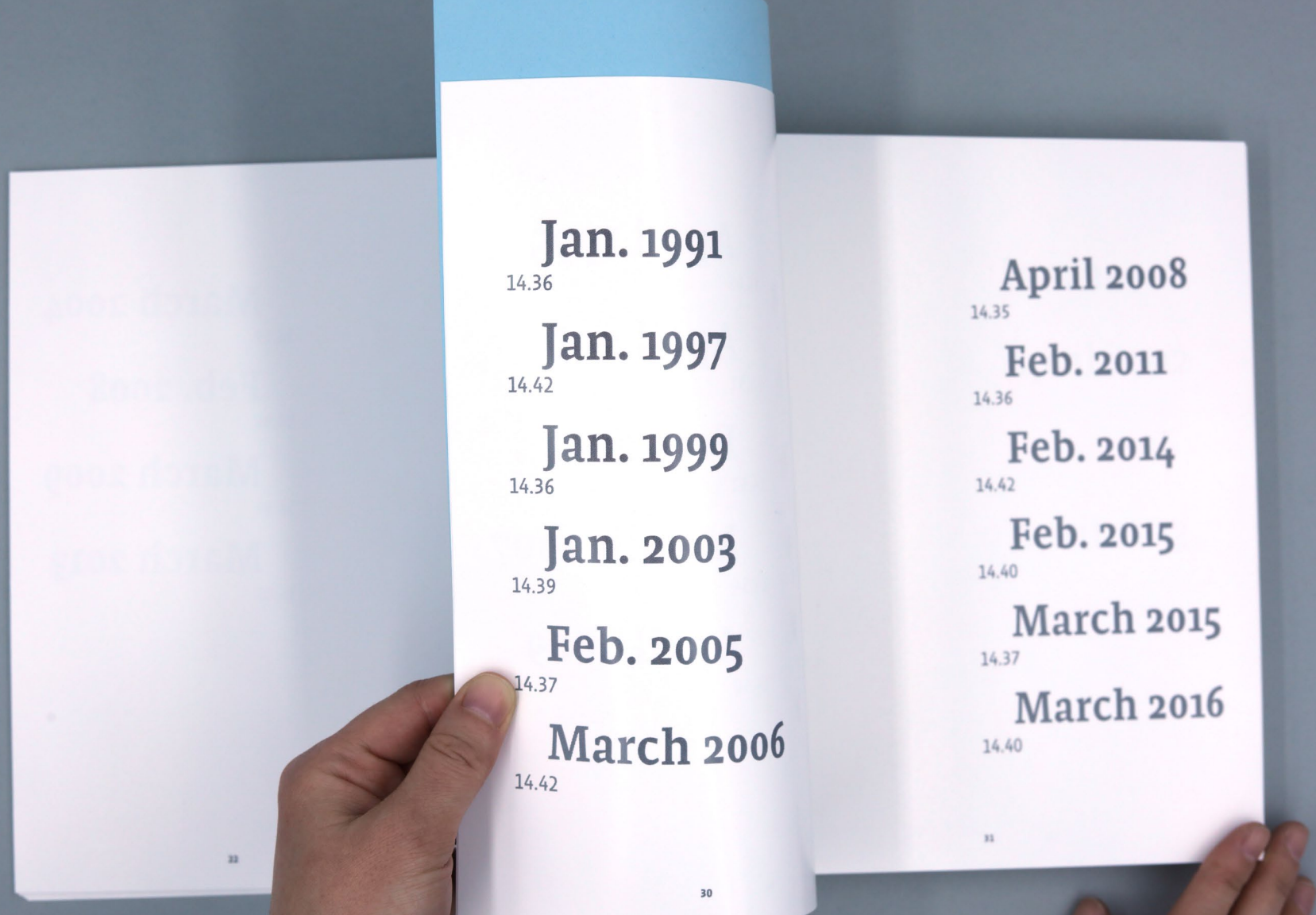
one page, indicating ice gain. Twenty seconds of audio represents one month, so four minutes represents one year. This translates the reading experience into a sensory one, where the volume and movement of the page tells the story itself.

Arctic Ice, Translated



June responds to sound clips that indicate for her to walk forward.

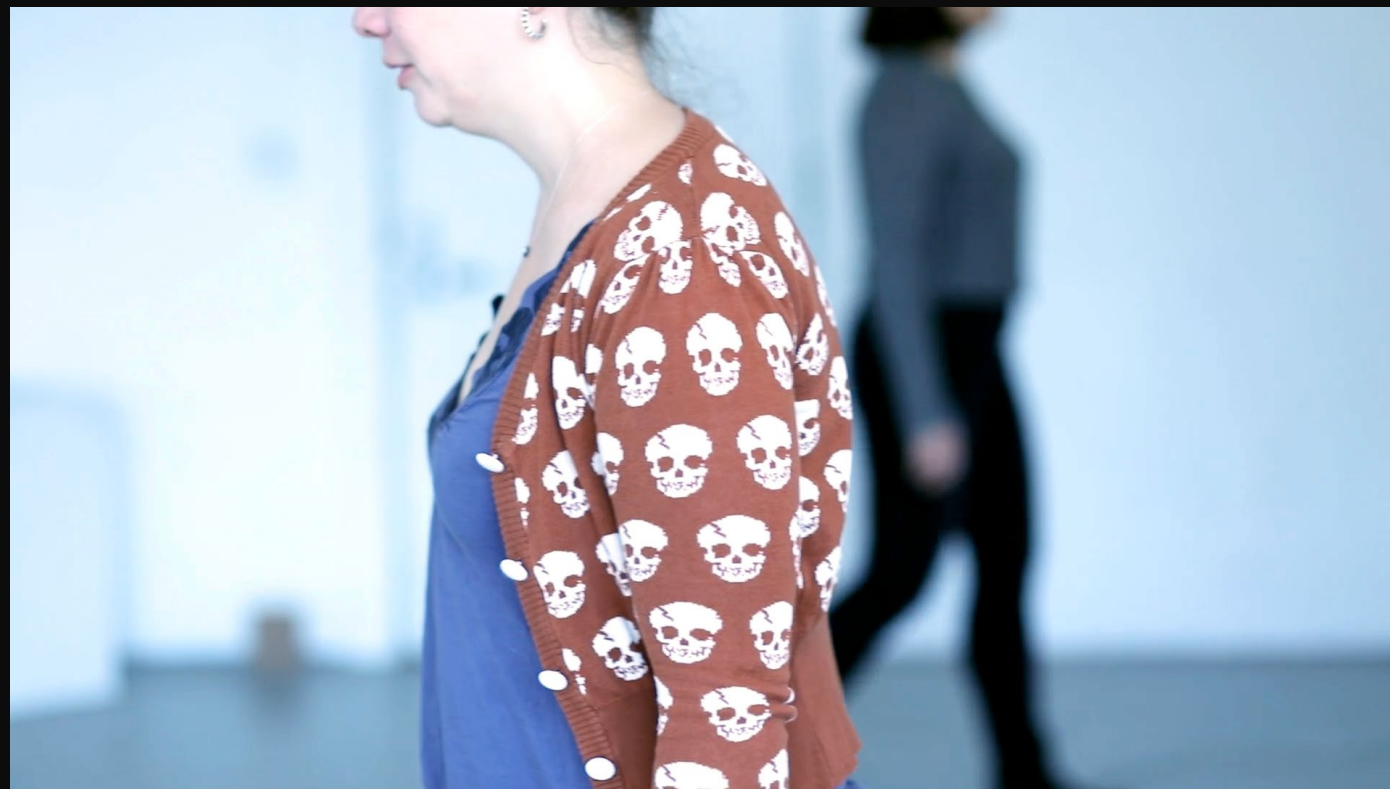
131



*Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*, Kassel, Germany, by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, 2012. In this video walk, participants borrow an ipod and headphones and follow the instructions of Cardiff's voice to move through the train station. The imagery in the video

reflects the same spaces that participants experience in real time, but they contain different details. I admire Cardiff and Miller's ability to guide an experience with sound while using a medium to drive a concept.

Inspiration



Following the same instructions together produces a choreography of multiple movements.



## Silent Soundscape

Installation: 7'x7'x8' room constructed from wood, plastic, insulation, 2 projectors and ear plugs, documented as video.  
 Video duration: 1 minute 22 seconds  
 Special thanks to Michael Auman for construction magic

Opening the door to the room reveals circular white walls and sounds projected as typography in space.



What does it look like to create a project whose subject is sound but contains no audio? Writer Kim Tingley describes an “ear cleaning exercise” in the *New York Times Magazine Voyages* issue whereby you sit in a space to record all the sounds that you hear. At the same time, a recording device captures all the sounds in the space, including those unheard in real time. I conducted this exercise and translated my experience using text only. My goal was to show sound in space without any sound at all, and without any images of that space.

A circular room in a square box that simulates an anechoic chamber—a room devoid of reflective sound. From the outside, purple insulation and exposed wood establishes an unfinished appearance. A shoe rack sits next to the door, signalling people to remove their footwear. On a pedestal sits purple earplugs, neatly arranged in pairs. You put them in your ears and enter the room. Your other senses are now heightened. Inside you see clean, curved white walls. White floor and ceiling. This creates the illusion of an infinite void.

White pillows rest on the floor, inviting you to sit and relax. Text appears, glides and crawls across the inner white wall, translating sounds in space over real time. Each person creates their own imagined space in their mind—a unique sensory experience within each individual consciousness.

Light forms the text from two projectors. Both light and sound are transient, yet exist as physical waveforms. Both can be felt. While sound creates vibrations, light generates heat. Each person entering the room experiences the environment differently. For some it is calming and meditative. For others it demands imagination—of a space, of silence. After exiting the room, several people described different scenes they pictured to translate the text. *Silent Soundscape* aims to expose the range of human perception.

Ultimately a short film documents the installation experience. Careful editing of video and audio translates this to the controlled space of the screen. Watching the film becomes yet another experience and opportunity for personal interpretation.

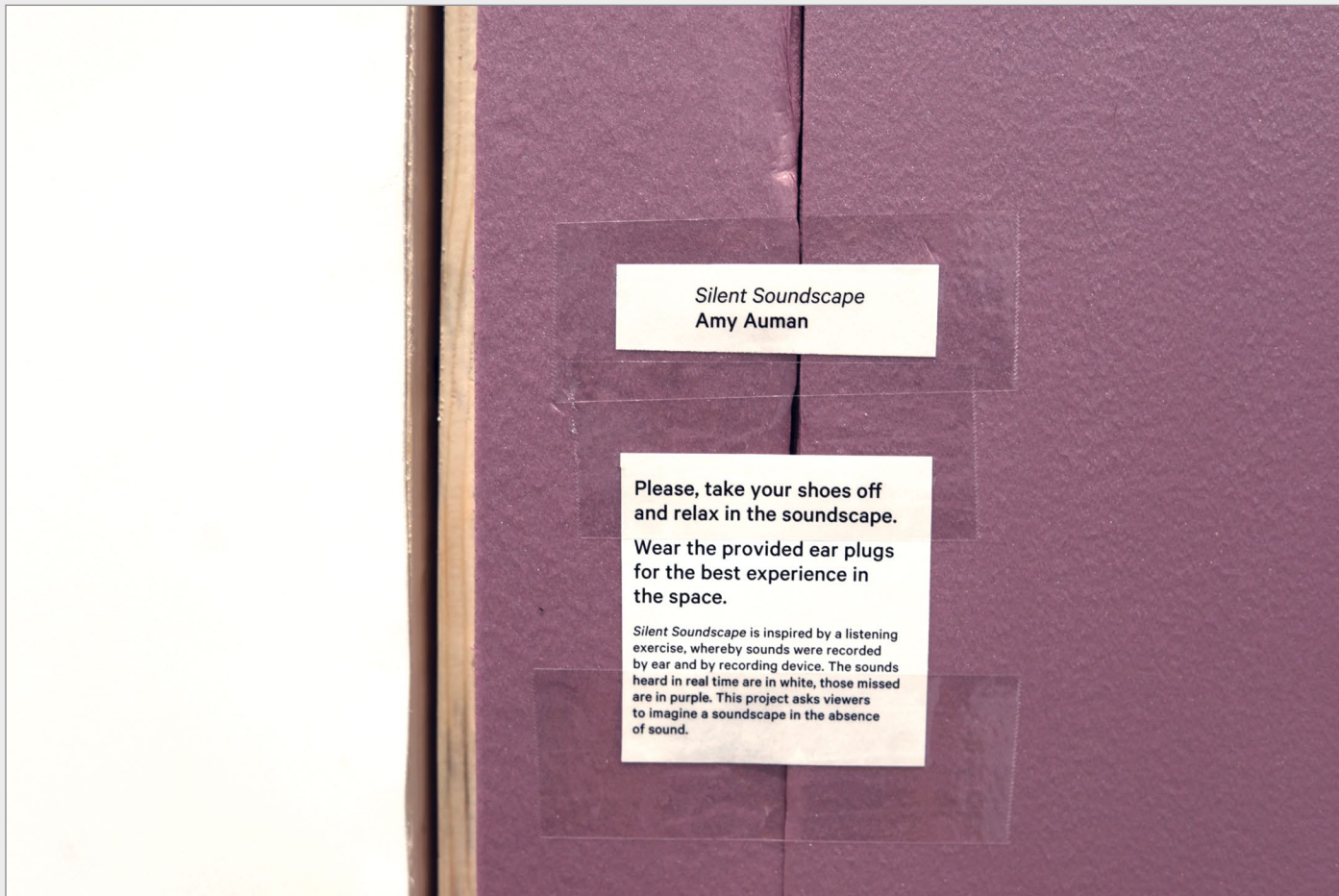


### Inspiration

Jeppé Hein's *Invisible Labyrinth* from 2005 invites visitors to solve an invisible maze by considering visual maps on the wall while walking through an empty gallery. Vibrating infrared sensors react when the visitor encounters an invisible wall.

Year	Month	Temperature 1	Temperature 2
1990	3	Goodard	15.87
1993	3	Goodard	15.81
1998	2	Goodard	15.75
1993	2	Goodard	15.69
1998	3	Goodard	15.6
1990	2	Goodard	15.58
1994	2	Goodard	15.56
1994	2	Goodard	15.55
2001	3	Goodard	15.52
1992	3	Goodard	15.48
2003	3	Goodard	15.48
1997	2	Goodard	15.47
1992	2	Goodard	15.46
1997	2	Goodard	15.44
1991	3	Goodard	15.42
1993	3	Goodard	15.4
2002	3	Goodard	15.35
2002	2	Goodard	15.34
1999	2	Goodard	15.31
1995	2	Goodard	15.26
1991	2	Goodard	15.25
1995	2	Goodard	15.23
2000	3	Goodard	15.22
2001	2	Goodard	15.21
2012	3	Goodard	15.2
2003	2	Goodard	15.19
2008	3	Goodard	15.18
1996	2	Goodard	15.15
2008	2	Goodard	15.14
2010	3	Goodard	15.14
1996	3	Goodard	15.12
1992	4	Goodard	15.08
1999	4	Goodard	15.08
2013	3	Goodard	15.03
2004	3	Goodard	14.99
2009	3	Goodard	14.98
2008	2	Goodard	14.95
2004	2	Goodard	14.91
1993	1	Goodard	14.9
1994	4	Goodard	14.89
1998	4	Goodard	14.89
1991	4	Goodard	14.86
2001	4	Goodard	14.86
2009	2	Goodard	14.81
1990	1	Goodard	14.78
2014	3	Goodard	14.76
1994	1	Goodard	14.73
1998	3	Goodard	14.72
2013	2	Goodard	14.72
2005	3	Goodard	14.69
1992	4	Goodard	14.68
2010	4	Goodard	14.66
1990	4	Goodard	14.65
1992	1	Goodard	14.64
2012	4	Goodard	14.63

Spreadsheet used to organize the ice data.



One projector sits embedded in the structure's wall, while the other lies on the floor. When participants walk in front of the floor projection, it blocks the image,

underlining that which goes unnoticed. Instructions taped to the insulation guide the participants' experience.







00:01



00:04



00:07



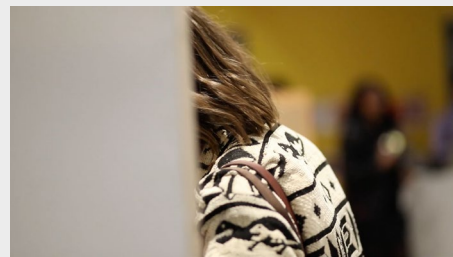
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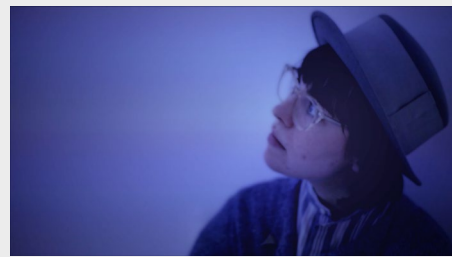
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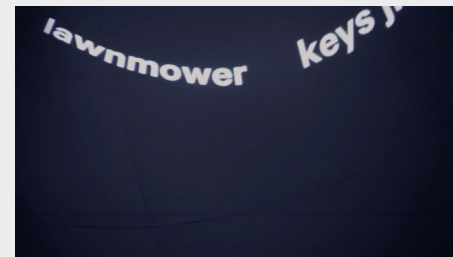
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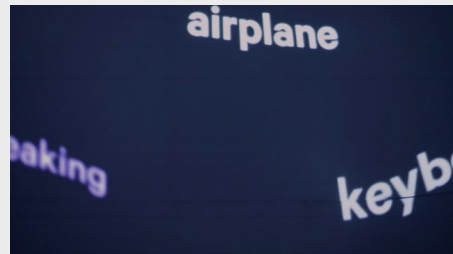
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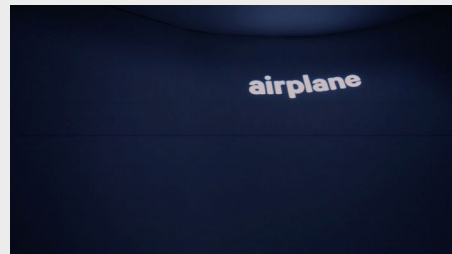
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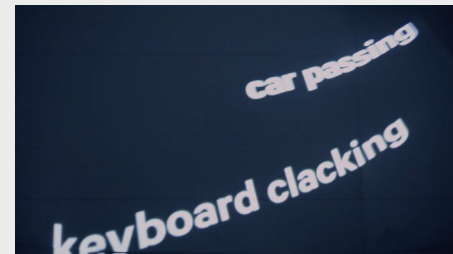
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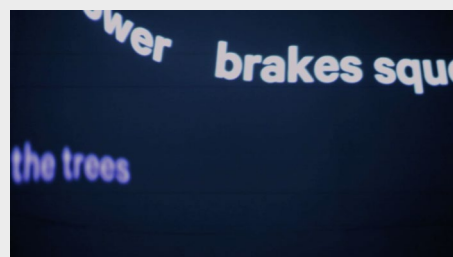
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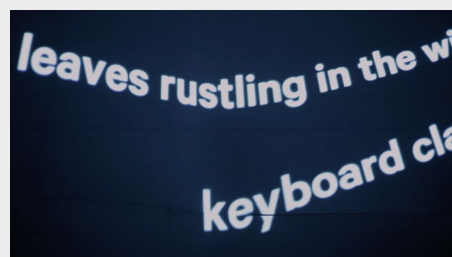
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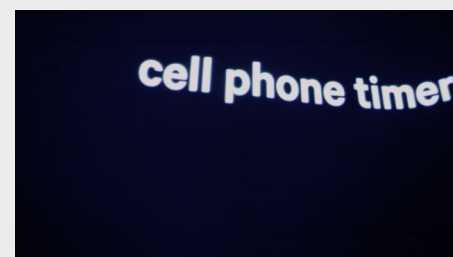
00:56



01:04



01:07



01:20

During the opening exhibition, studio-mates and alumni put in earplugs and take off their shoes before entering the silent soundscape. The volume of the room was rather high during the event, forcing participants to imagine silence.

Pictured: Carson Evans, Olivia de Salve Villedieu and Goeun Park.



White and purple words move across the curvature of the walls, asking participants to consider the dimensionality of spatial sound.

lammower

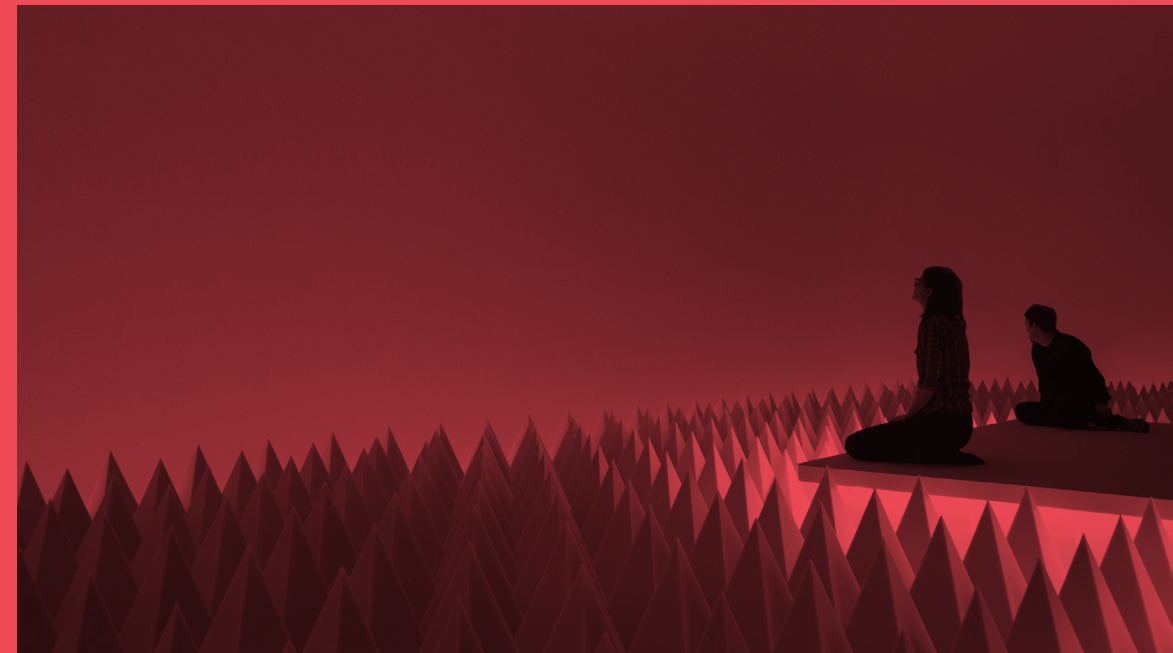
brakes s

in the trees



Various stages of the room's assembly, initially plotted in my living room, then moved to the DC Commons for final setup.

Pictured: Michael Auman



PSAD Synthetic Desert III, an installation at the Guggenheim in New York by Doug Wheeler, 2017. Wheeler transforms the

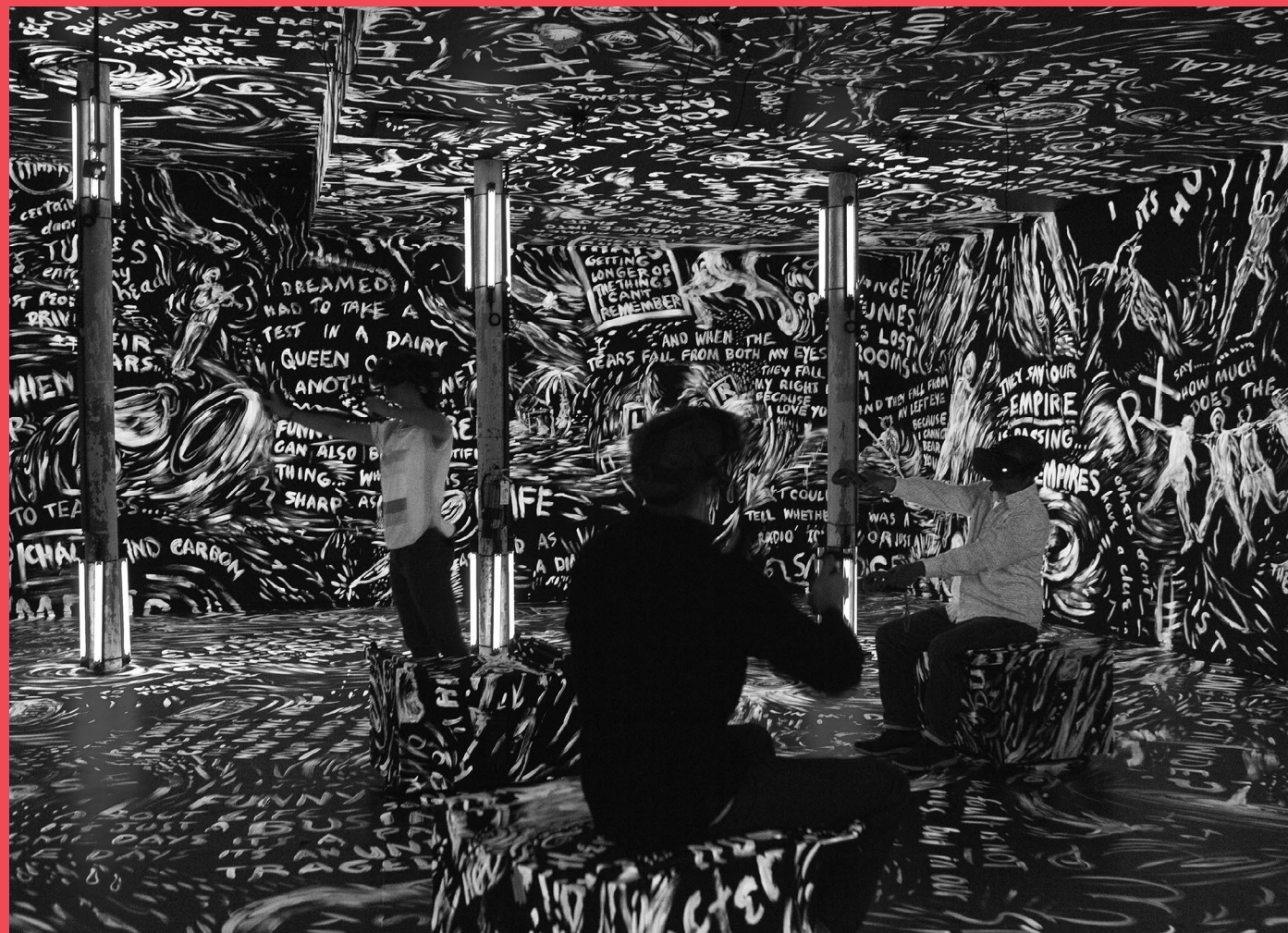
room so it is nearly soundproof and uses light to impress the idea of infinite space.

Inspiration



Another installation by Doug Wheeler, *The Illusion of Light*, featured at Palazzo

Grassi in Venice, 2014, showcases the sensation of infinite space.



### Inspiration

*Chalkroom*, a virtual reality work at Mass MoCA by Laurie Anderson and Hsin-Chien Huang, 2017. Words and stories fly through the space, unforming and reforming. Participants

roam freely through several chambers to journey through the space, which contains graffiti-like imagery. Anderson's voice delivers the audio to guide the participants.

## Future Forward

With Aleks Dawson, Eury Kim and Annaka Olsen  
Guided tour of a fictional startup; 16' U-Haul moving truck, photography backdrop, projector, balloons, chairs, audio soundtrack, LED lights, laser-cut wooden signage

The Future Forward Team poses inside the Automated Innovation Vehicle, also known as a U-haul moving truck.



## Future Forward

With Aleks Dawson, Eury Kim and Annaka Olsen  
Guided tour of a fictional startup; 16' U-Haul moving truck, photography backdrop, projector, balloons, chairs, audio soundtrack, LED lights, laser-cut wooden signage

Expert employees (Aleks Dawson, Annaka Olsen Eury Kim and myself) lead prospective investors on a guided tour of Future Forward—an innovation startup company. To start, the investors receive and sign Non-Disclosure Agreements. The group then moves to a secret location via the Autonomous Innovation Vehicle (a.k.a. the storage unit in a U-Haul). The vehicle transports the participants to various stops in the company, including the HR Department and Innovation Fabrications Laboratory. The lack of windows secures complete confidentiality. At the end, participants attend a presentation on financials and receive investment packets.

Behind the scenes, our team keeps the participants in the alley behind RISD's CIT building. After each stop, the vehicle "travels" to the next

location, which means the truck simply moves forward and backward to its original spot. A corporate-style slideshow accompanies each fictional location. Inspirational startup music plays during the moving part of the tour, while office sounds filter through the presentation portions. At the very end, the participants travel unknowingly around the block, to end up in the front of the building where the tour begins.

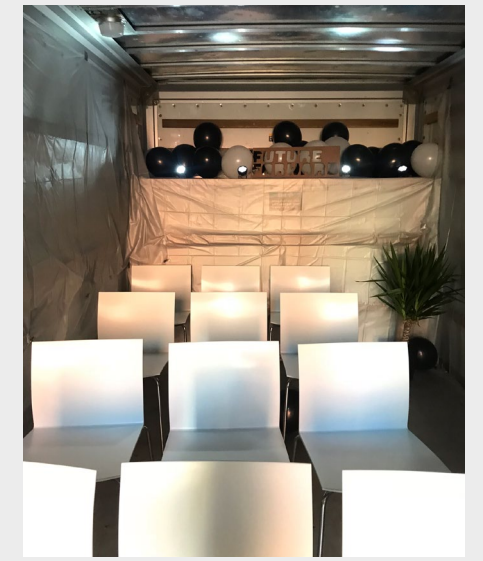
*Future Forward's* strange stops and run-arounds emphasize the elusive nature of startups. The script, full of empty jargon and little actual description, pokes fun at Silicon valley and the culture of innovation companies. The absurdity of the experience produces an outrageous and entertaining parody. Our group raises issues around big tech through fiction and humor.

# FUTURE FORWARD

When the door of the Automated Innovation Vehicle closes, participants can view the Future Forward Identity. Plants line the floor of the truck to mimic office spaces in Silicon Valley.

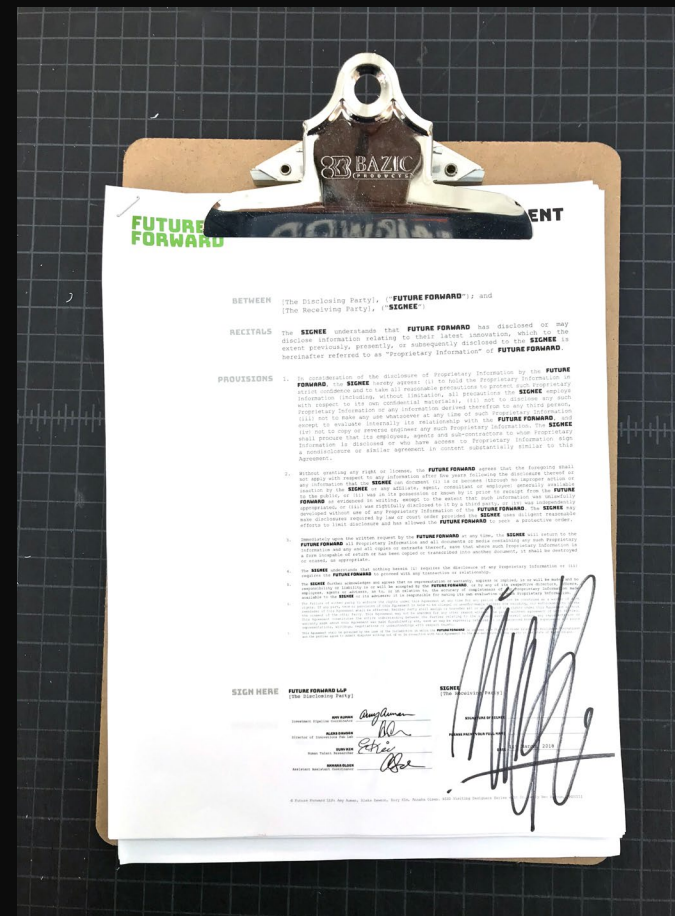


Participants sit in chairs lined up in the vehicle. The door closes and the truck moves to the next location, which actually lies in the same location every time. The team presents the company's success via a corporate slide show full of tech jargon.



Before constructing the tour, the team toured the State House to better understand key elements. These include signs of authority (such as uniform), visual aids (such as print-outs), and scripting.

Opposite: Signed NDAs and employee identification cards signal officiality.





Visiting designer Nelly Ben Hayoun and Bethany Johns enjoy front row seats in the vehicle. At the end of the tour, the truck traversed a mysterious route before

returning to the front of the CIT building of RISD. Music plays and participants bop balloons while riding to their final destination.

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Future Forward

## Year 2500

Video  
Duration: 2 minutes 35 seconds

*Year 2500* is a speculative fiction of a dystopian future, where the only humans in existence live on the International Space Station orbiting a now-flooded earth. A voice performs the narrative's events. It echoes as the story begins in outer space, then becomes clearer and closer when you journey to the depths of the ocean. Dolphin clicks, sonar beeps, a rushing of water and rain—all build an experience of a sensory-filled world.

The use of subverted tools creates a light-filled visual parallel to the narrative. The footage is a progression of noise as signal. Made from aggressive transposition, it leverages reflection, projection and changes in camera focus. The human hand physically manipulates each shot. In the end of the narrative, human error eventually results in the species' demise.

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Participants—potential investors of Future Forward—exit the Autonomous Innovation Vehicle at the end of the tour. Cheering ensues.

BOOST

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Moving image of the beach through mirror paper; one of the first video sketches that led to *Year 2500*.

149

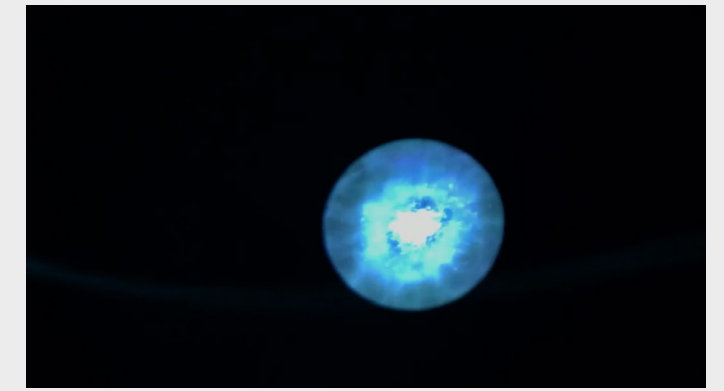
## Year 2500

Video  
Duration: 2 minutes 35 seconds

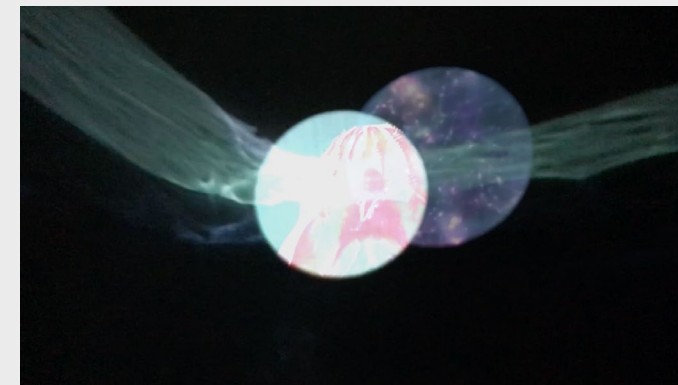
A blending of blinking lights aligns with audio playing sonar.



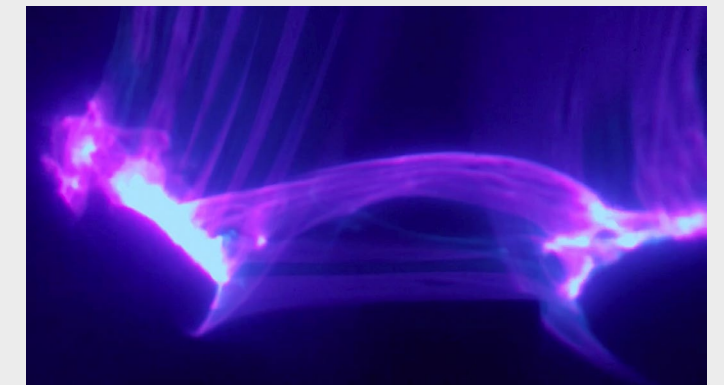
00:04



00:10



00:17



00:25

BOOST 151

148

## Year 2500

Video  
Duration: 2 minutes 35 seconds

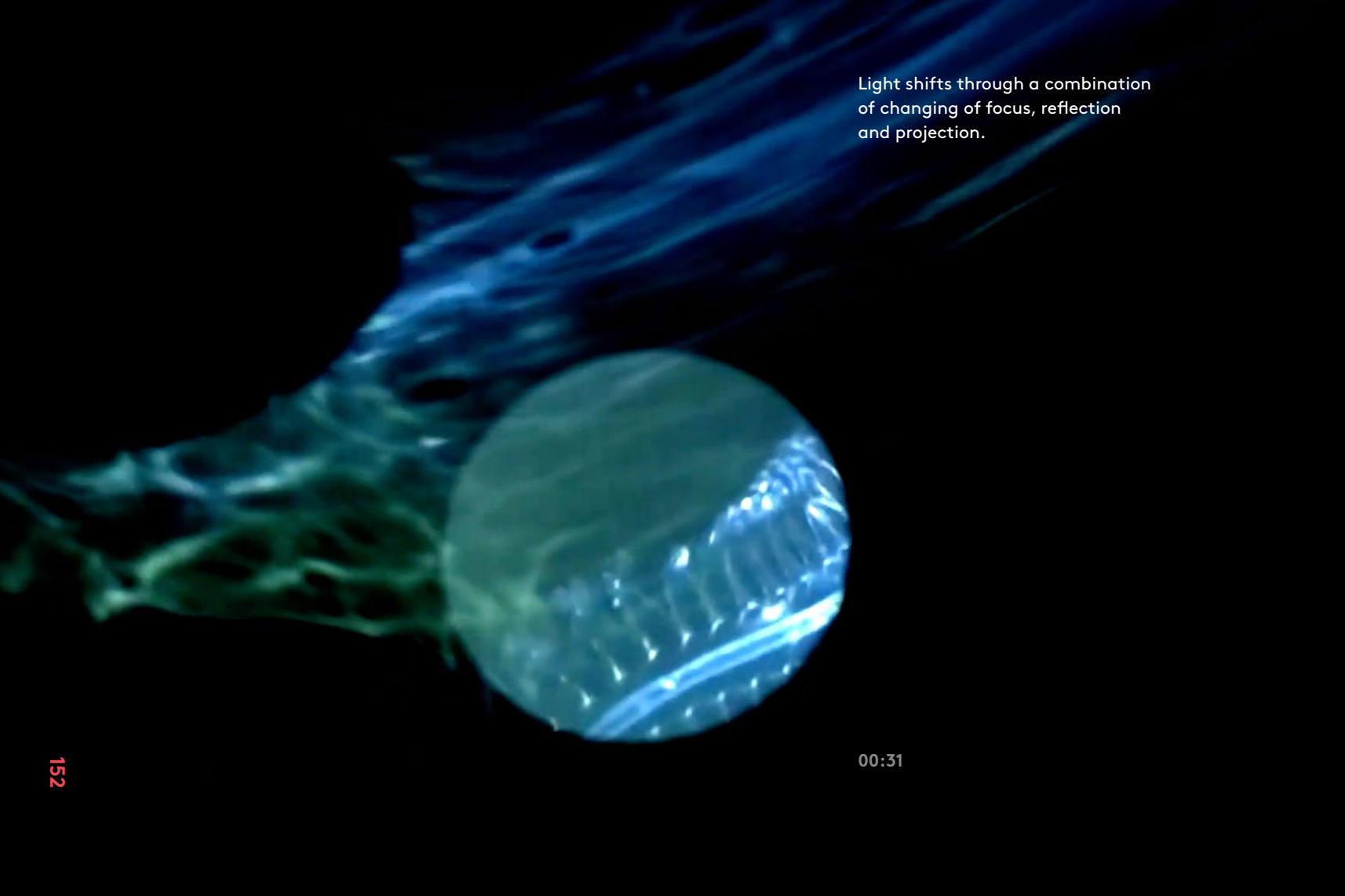
*Year 2500* is a speculative fiction of a dystopian future, where the only humans in existence live on the International Space Station orbiting a now-flooded earth. A voice performs the narrative's events. It echoes as the story begins in outer space, then becomes clearer and closer when you journey to the depths of the ocean. Dolphin clicks, sonar beeps, a rushing of water and rain—all build an experience of a sensory-filled world.

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Moving image of the beach through mirror paper; one of the first video sketches that led to *Year 2500*.

149

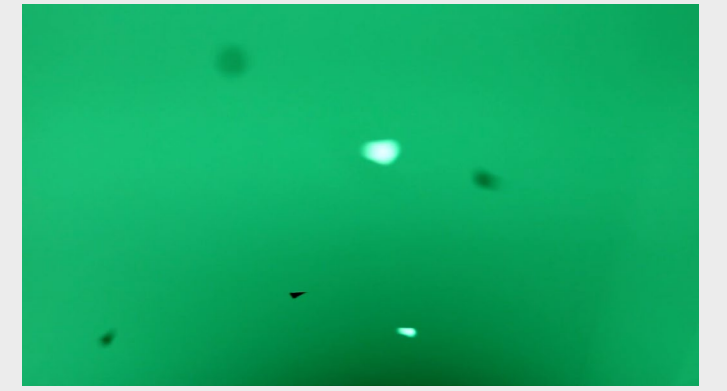


Light shifts through a combination of changing of focus, reflection and projection.

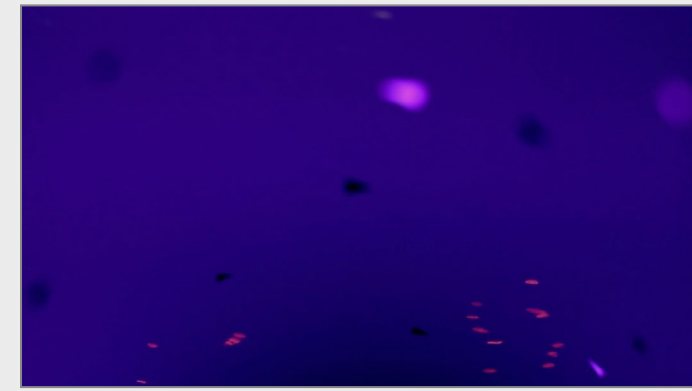
00:31



00:47



01:01



01:10



01:15



Video sketch pairs sounds of dolphins and sonar with beach footage, made by reflection and unexpected camera angles.

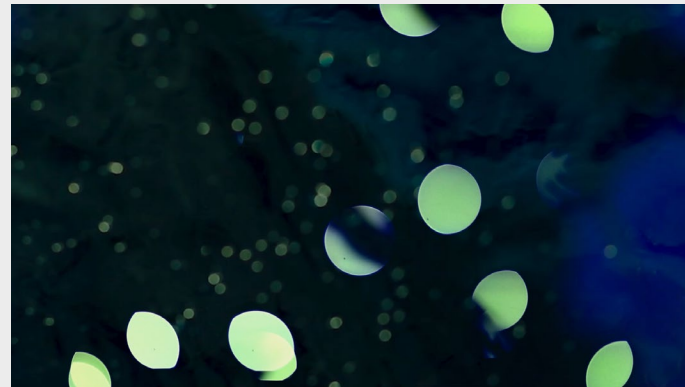




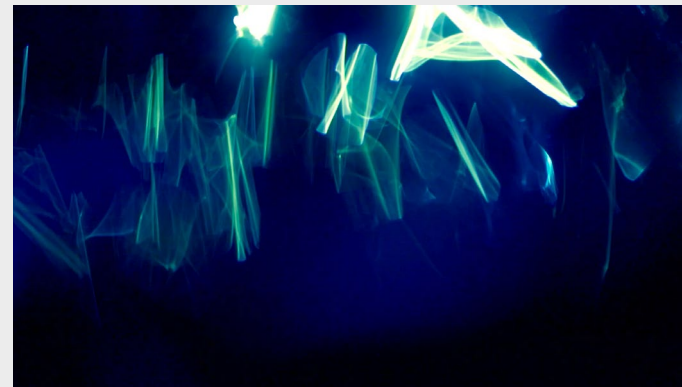
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01:41



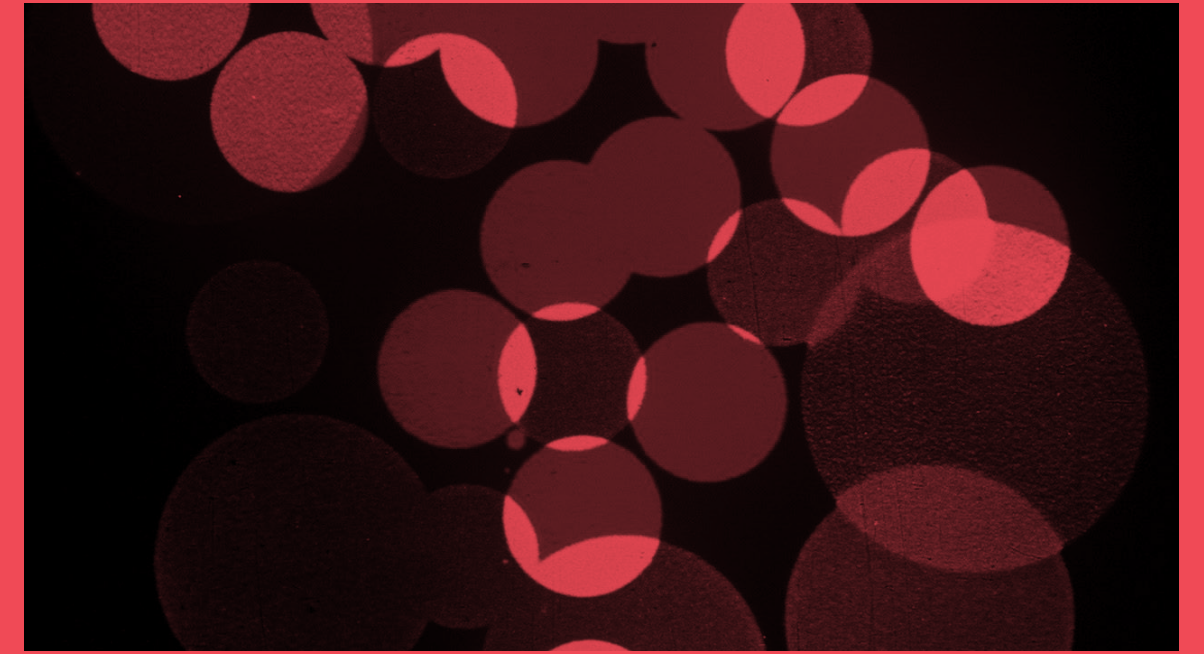
01:58



02:30

154

Year 2500



Still frame from Oskar Fischinger's 1931 film *Studie Number 8*. Fischinger used the analogue technique of creating frame-by-frame stop motion animations.

Inspiration

BOOST

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Another video sketch that informs *Year 2500*. Leaves and other objects from

the space hint that the abstraction is created on a physical surface.

152

Year 2500



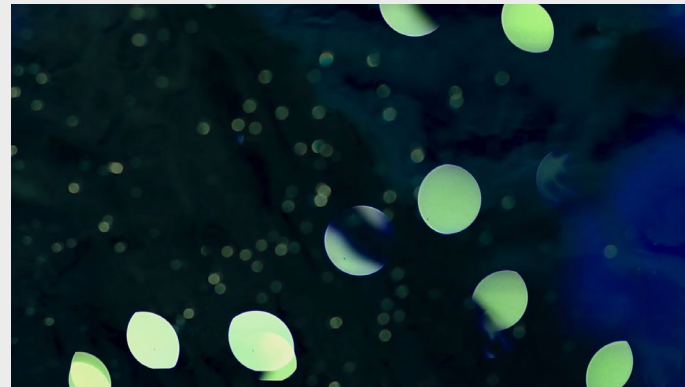
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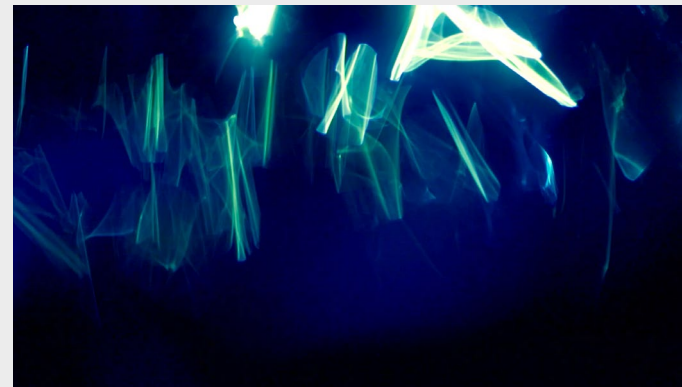
01:27



01:41



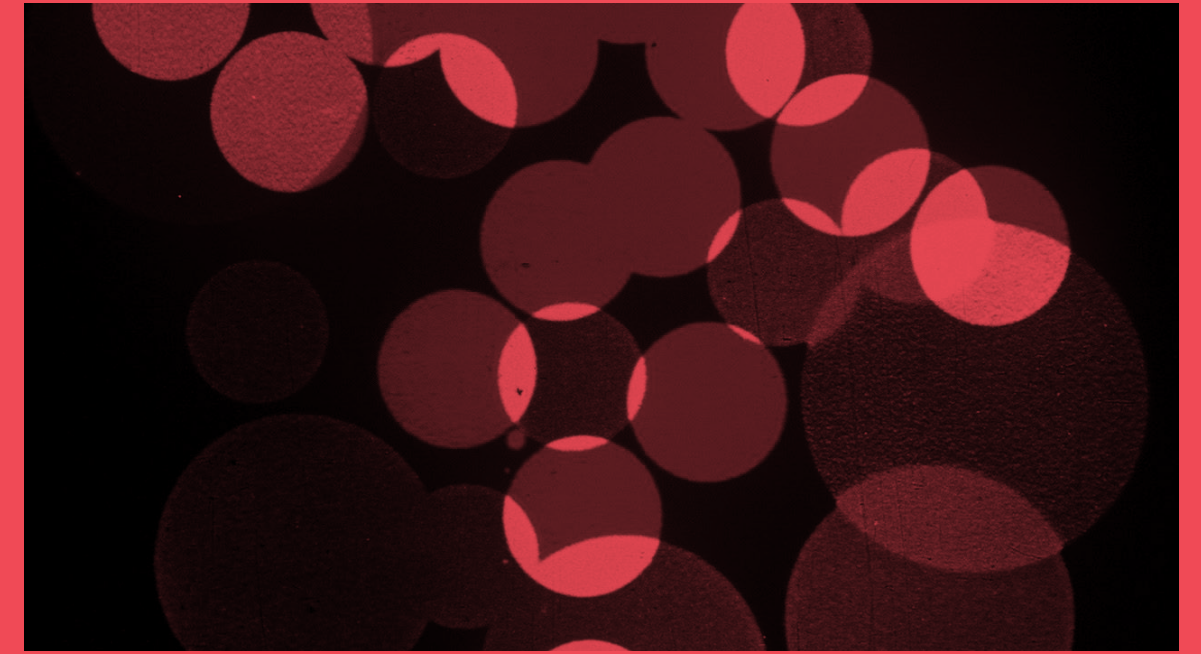
01:58



02:30

154

Year 2500



Still frame from Oskar Fischinger's 1931 film *Studie Number 8*. Fischinger used the analogue technique of creating frame-by-frame stop motion animations.

Inspiration

BOOST

155



154

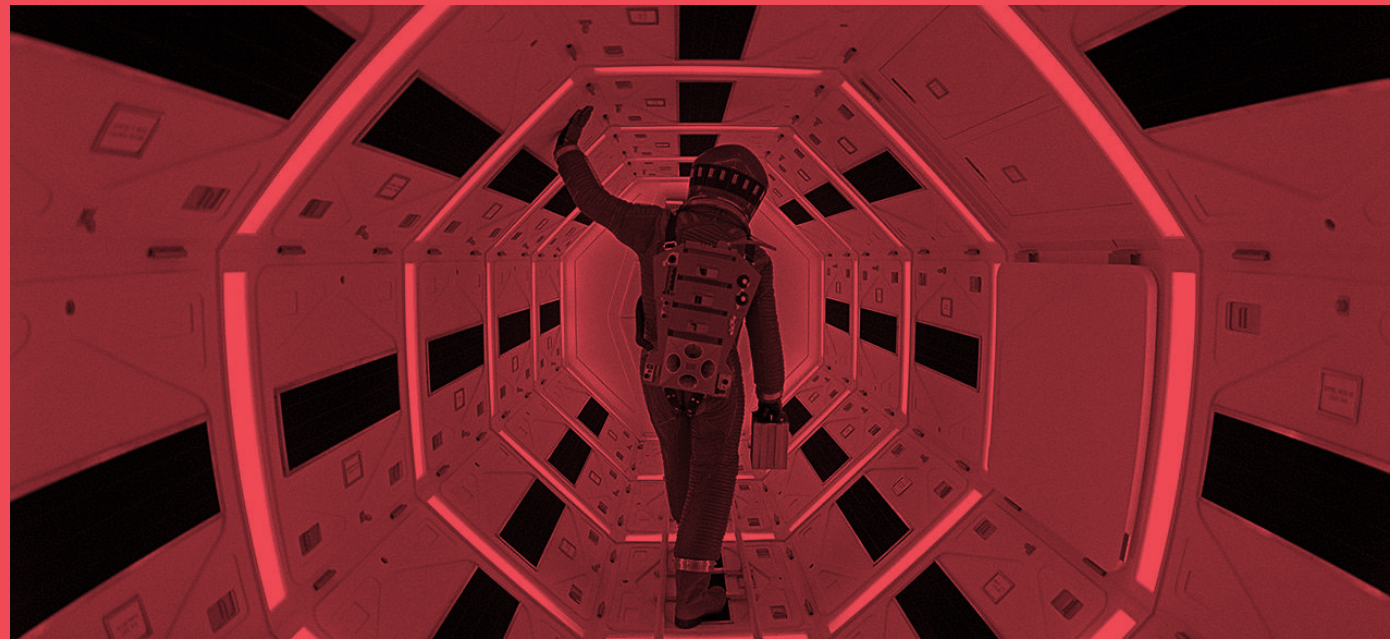
Year 2500



The process involved many awkward takes in the areas around RISD Beach. Attempting to maintain proper camera

focus while simultaneously holding mirror paper made staying out of the frame rather challenging.

155

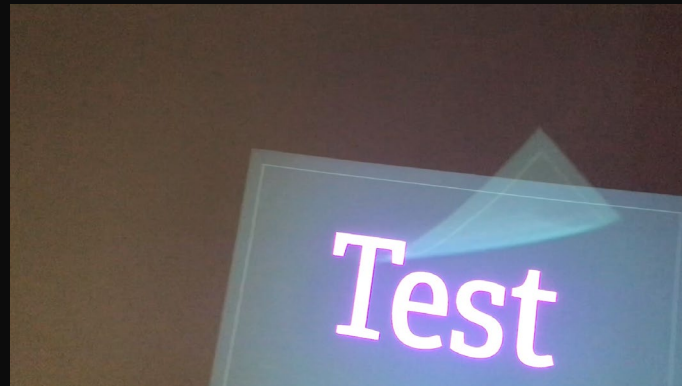
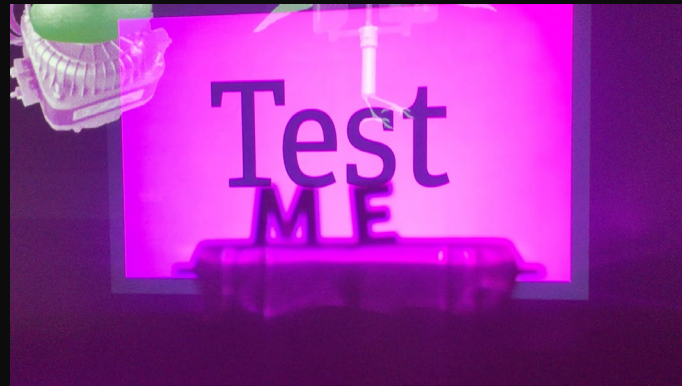
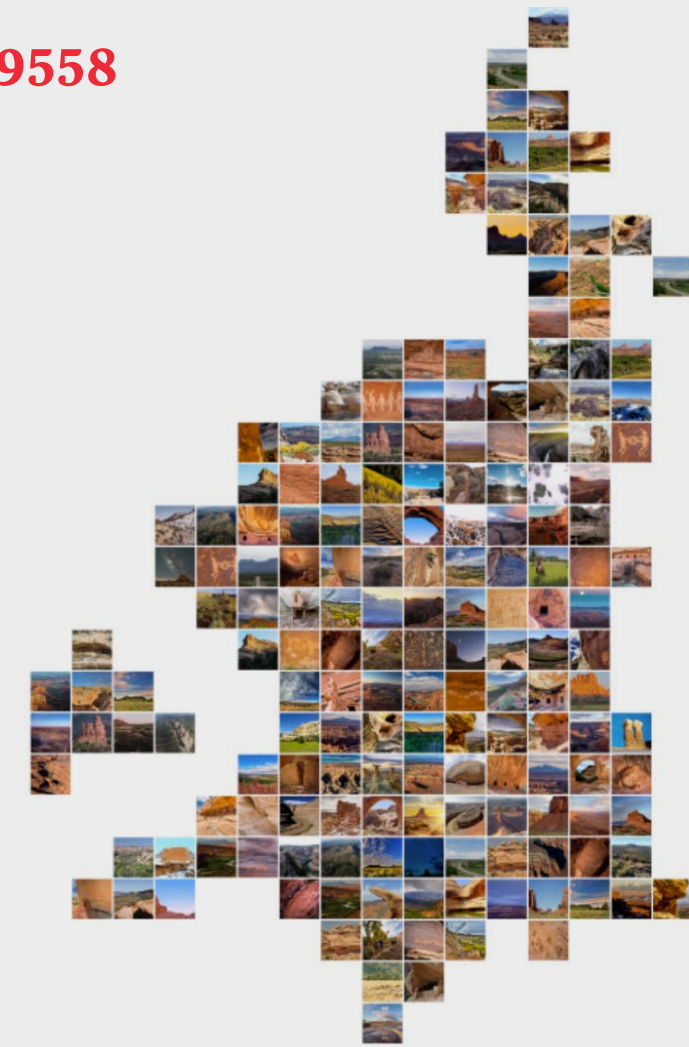


**Inspiration**

The 1968 sci-fi film *2001: A Space Odyssey* directed by Stanley Kubrick takes an unsettling journey through the past and the future, where humans and machines collide. The audio plays an integral role in the film, specifically through the voice of Hal, a computer that operates the spaceship featured in the plot.

**Proclamation 9558**

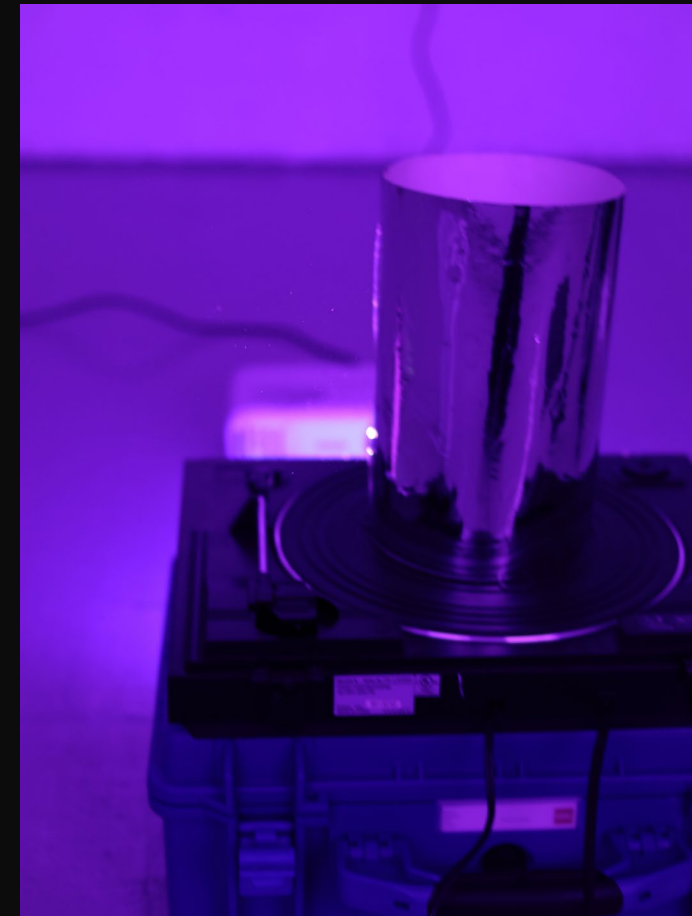
Video  
Duration: 1 minute 6 seconds

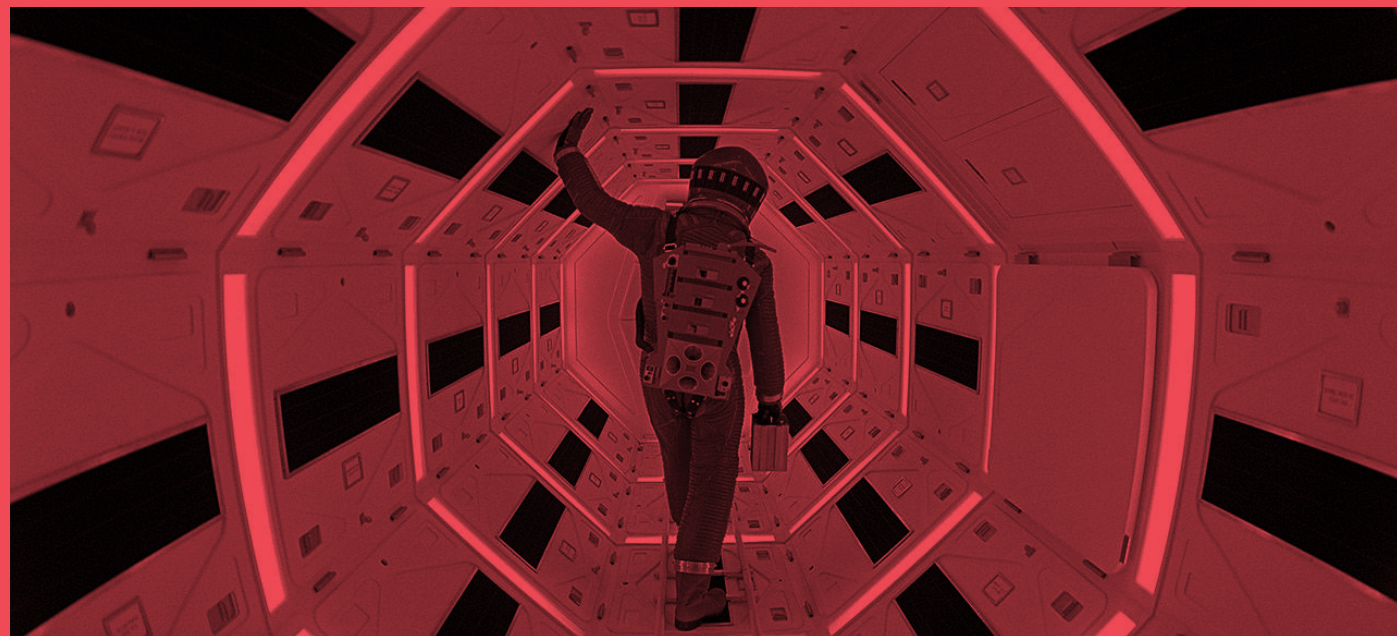


Playing with the projector and various reflective surfaces yielded surprising optical effects. I initially struggled with

landing on the appropriate story for my experiments. Evaluating the results of various tests, I began to think about bio-

luminescence and objects that spin or orbit. Outer space and the deep ocean are both mysterious worlds that lend themselves to a weird science fiction.



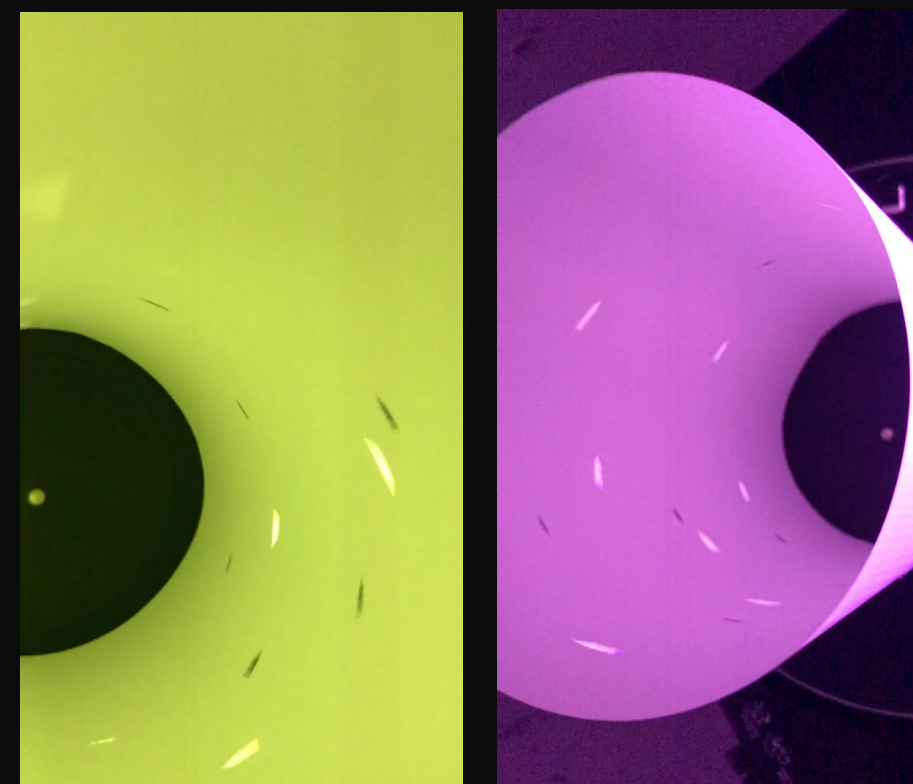
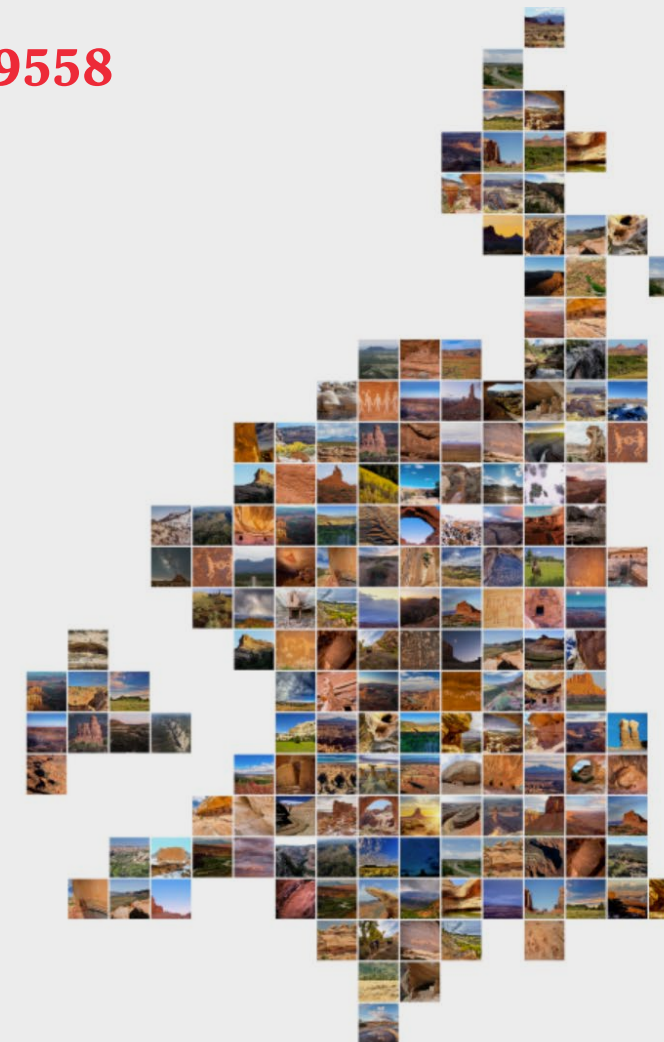


### Inspiration

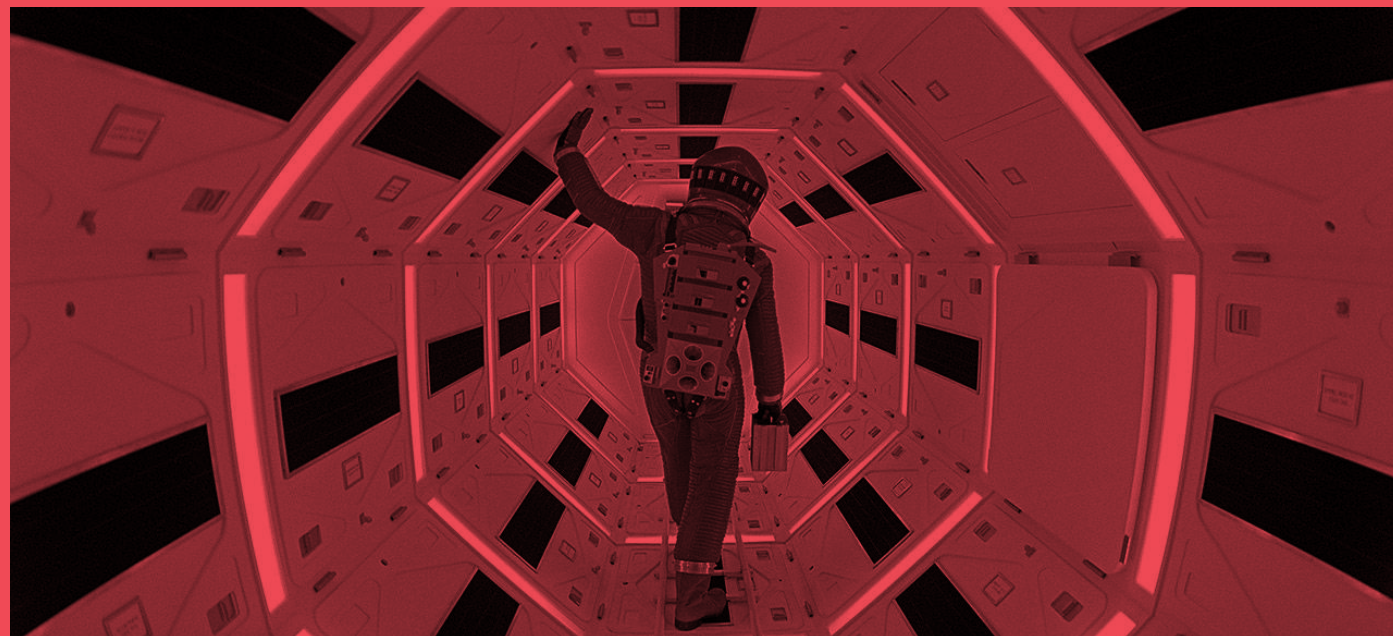
The 1968 sci-fi film *2001: A Space Odyssey* directed by Stanley Kubrick takes an unsettling journey through the past and the future, where humans and machines collide. The audio plays an integral role in the film, specifically through the voice of Hal, a computer that operates the spaceship featured in the plot.

## Proclamation 9558

Video  
Duration: 1 minute 6 seconds



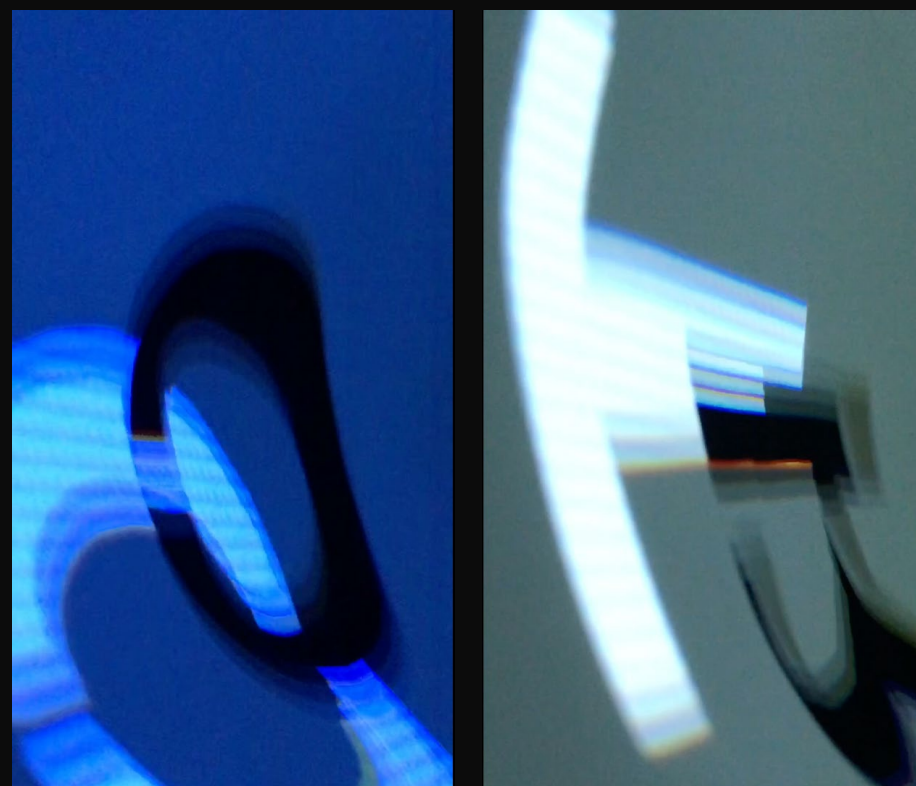
When light projects onto spinning paper with triangular cutouts, a mesmerizing analog animation dances along the cylindrical interior.



### Inspiration

The 1968 sci-fi film *2001: A Space Odyssey* directed by Stanley Kubrick takes an unsettling journey through the past and the future, where humans and machines

collide. The audio plays an integral role in the film, specifically through the voice of Hal, a computer that operates the spaceship featured in the plot.

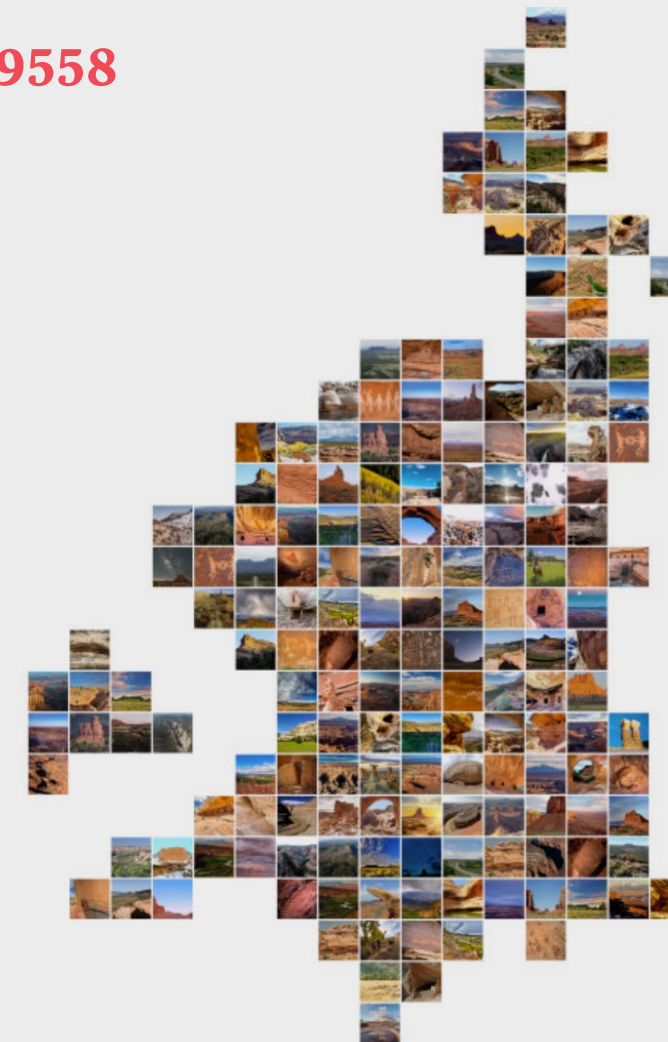


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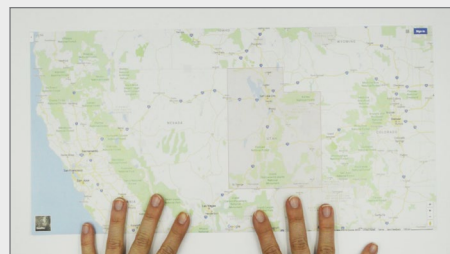
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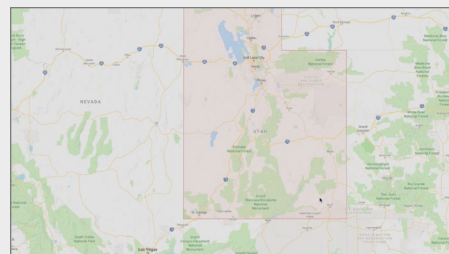
On December 28, 2016, Barack Obama established the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah with Proclamation 9558. It covered an area of 1,351,849 acres. This land, considered sacred by Native Americans, bears natural, cultural and historic significance, and contains tens of thousands of archaeological sites. Just under one year later, on December 4, 2017, President Donald Trump followed recommendations from Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and reduced the monument by 85%. The areas removed from the monument are now open to privatization.

This video juxtaposes the establishment and vast beauty of the protected land area with its swift erasure following President Trump's announcement. This announcement comprises the audio for the video. A sleight of hand created with

video editing transitions between digital images of the place and printed, physical translations. The film begins with a paper map that becomes Google Maps when zooming in. The grid of the initial Bears Ears monument appears, which is zoomed in on further and replaced by physical photographs of the place. They transition to moving pictures before a zooming out reveals the entire grid of images. A hand physically removes the grid from the previous land area to reveal the current area in enormous contrast. While people might read about Bears Ears and try to understand it using Google Maps and images, it is viscerally located on a vast expanse of desert. *Proclamation 9558* highlights that reality—and the reality of its loss. The video ends with ironic applause from the crowd. The people of the United States are fervently divided in this political era.



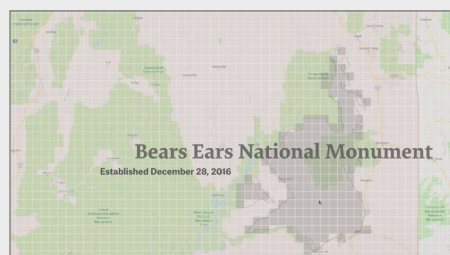
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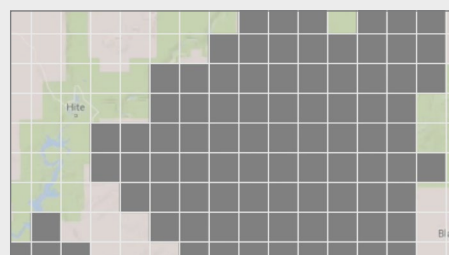
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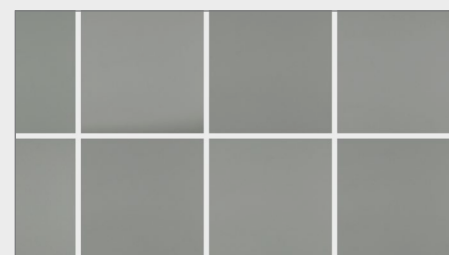
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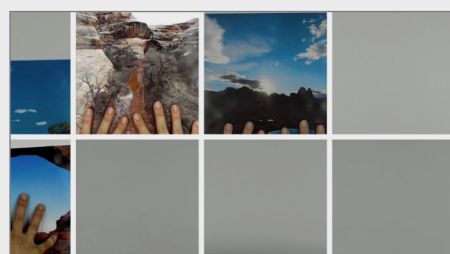
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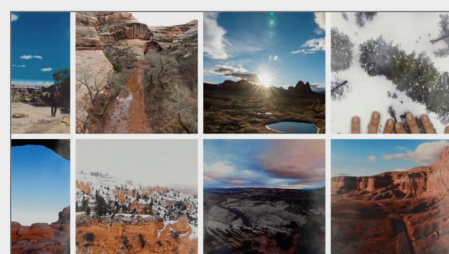
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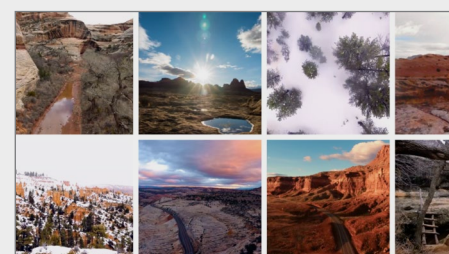
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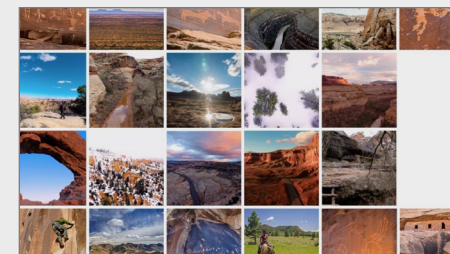
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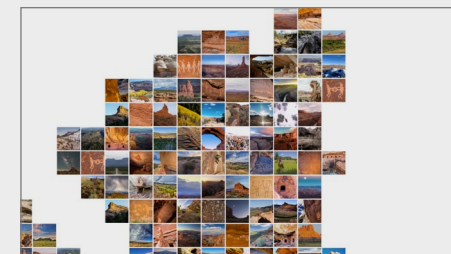
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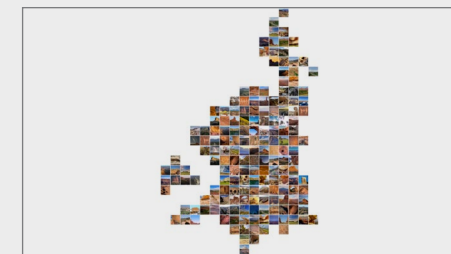
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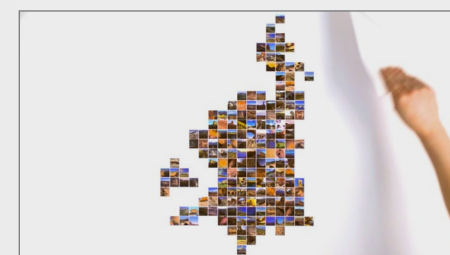
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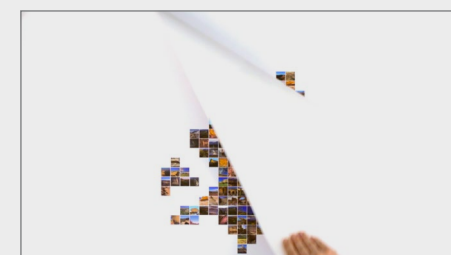
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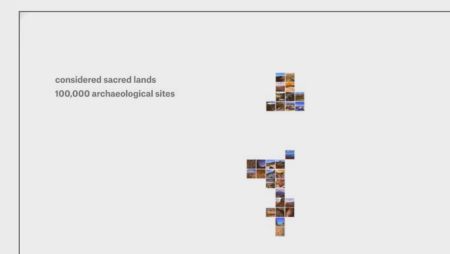
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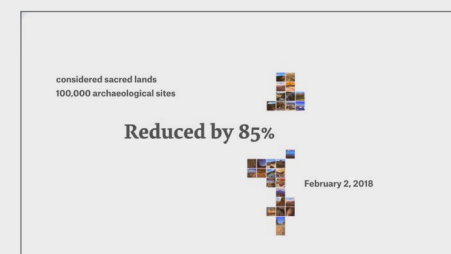
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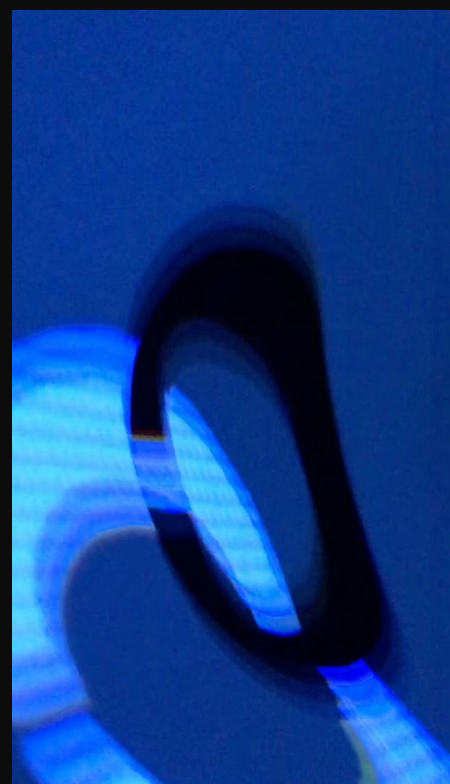
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BOOST

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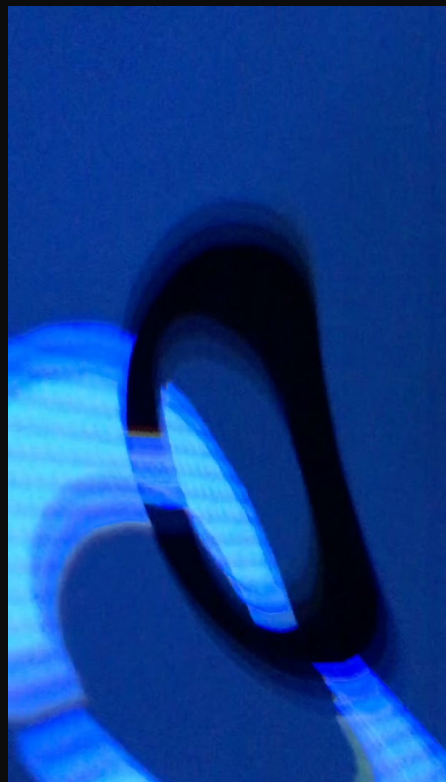


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Proclamation 9558

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Year 2500



The Chemical Brothers 1999 music video for *Let Forever Be*, directed by Michel Gondry, implements transitions between digital and physical spaces.

Inspiration

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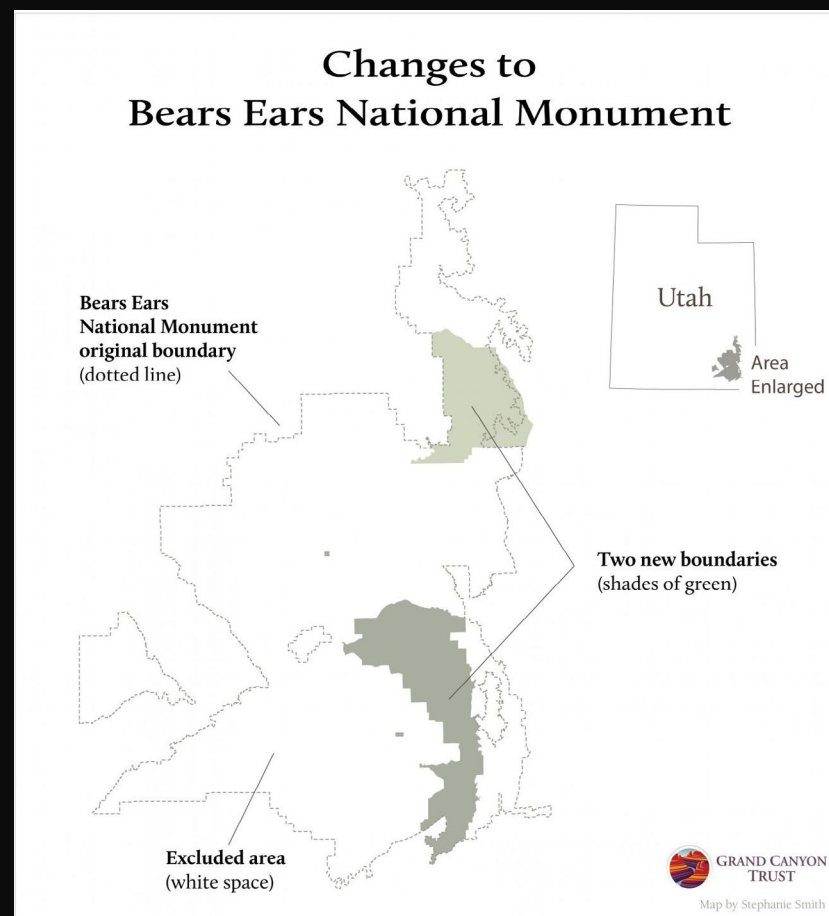
Still frame from the 1988 documentary film *Thin Blue Line*, directed by Errol Morris. Morris' innovative approach to documentary film making included reenactments, which laid the ground-work for integrating fiction and artistic license with archival footage.

Inspiration

## Teddy Blanks

Interview: Form and Practice

Teddy Blanks is a designer and co-founder of CHIPS design studio in Brooklyn, New York. He is known for making title sequences for films and television shows, such as *Mozart in the Jungle*, *Russian Doll*, *Everything Sucks*, and *Lady Bird*. He composed the score for the film *Tiny Furniture* by Lena Dunham, and also has created podcast art for *The Dropout* and *Slow Burn*. His mastery of typography and form match his devotion to the practice.



Map of the previous boundaries compared with 2018 ones for Bears Ears National Monument.



**T:** Why don't you pull up a chair? We can look at stuff on my computer.

**A:** Yeah, that sounds great. First of all, I'm super excited to meet you.

**T:** Oh, I'm very happy to meet you as well. I'm actually working on a podcast cover today. Do you listen to *Slow Burn*?

**A:** Yeah.

**T:** So that's my friend Leon. He's doing a podcast called *Fiasco*, which is basically just *Slow Burn* but under a different name.



CHIPS' artwork for *Slow Burn*, a podcast by Slate about the Watergate scandal

**A:** Do you know what the story's going to be?

**T:** The first season is the Bush Gore Florida recount. So I'm trying to make a system basically, so that when he does a new story—like he's going to probably do Iran Contra in the future—he'll be able to switch out the cover when the season changes. There's another season, and he's thinking about doing all the protests in Boston after they desegregated the schools—the busing scandal. I'm going to present four concepts and let him choose essentially.

**A:** Awesome. What's your approach when you're working on podcast art? Do you get to hear the stories beforehand?

**T:** Sometimes. I haven't done a lot of podcast art, but I have weirdly recently been getting a bunch of those jobs. So for this one, they did give me the first episode to listen to.

**T:** That was helpful. And I was familiar with the story. So they chose this one (shows concept) and they had no notes, which is fairly rare—although I find I do my best work when no one gives me any notes. (Laughs.) But sometimes things can go on for many rounds of changes, as I'm sure you know.

**A:** Oh yeah.

**T:** Is the interest in sound and video and how they go together something that came about after you went to grad school? Or at some point were you like, I'm really interested in this so I'm going to go to grad school?

**A:** No, I didn't. I think it was latent in my work before coming to grad school. I have a lot of performance background—like I was a gymnast and then I played the violin and then later on in life, the fiddle. And I sang a capella in college.

**T:** Do you still play the fiddle?

**A:** A little.

**T:** That's so fun.

**A:** It's fun. I haven't gotten past the novice part. But yeah, I think that it was always something that interested me. And also I have a really hard time hearing sometimes, and my mother is eighty percent deaf.

**T:** I'll stay closer to this (leans into Zoom recorder), so it'll be better when you listen to it later.

**A:** So I think that may be why I was always so curious about how people communicate in different ways. But I didn't know beforehand that it was going to be something that I was into. But when I applied to RISD, some of my personal work related to sound and music and visualizing that, and capturing video. It was just a starting point, and since then it's just sort of taken off in my interest. It's unexpected but awesome.

**T:** Very cool. Well, I think the *Mozart* stuff is definitely the most relevant. So why don't we talk through some of that first.

**A:** Awesome.

**T:** So you are familiar with both of the years I did the title sequence?

**A:** Two and four, right?

**T:** Yeah. Season two—I can show you what I initially pitched to them. Basically what I knew they wanted was that essentially they're going to have an orchestra record this song by Phoenix. And each episode was going to have a slightly different orchestral kind of snippet from that recording, with a slightly different arrangement and maybe slightly different part of the song, but there would be ten to fifteen seconds where there weren't going to be any other credits. It would just be the title.

**T:** And they just wanted to make something kind of cool to go with this musical thing they were already undertaking. So this is the first thing I pitched, which is something based on classical album covers that are kind of geometric. Modernist. This was before I had actually heard the music.

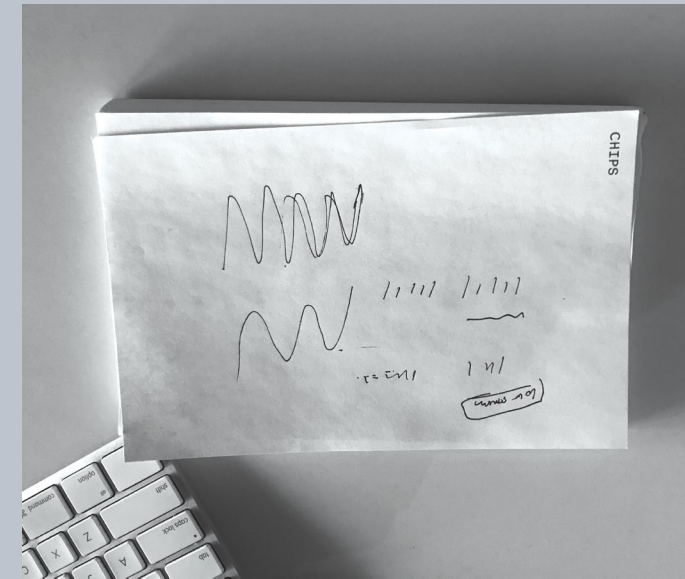
Then I just showed them a bunch of other type ideas. I'm so rarely in a position where I'm pitching an animated sequence. Mostly the title work I do is just choosing typography and putting it over a picture or on black. Like two or three times a year I get to do something of this kind of level of ambition. So in this case I didn't want them to get caught up over if they didn't like the font in the first idea here—that they would like ignore the thing.

So I was just wanting to show them this can work with whatever. They liked the first one and then I basically started in on a conversation with Jason Schwartzman, who was the producer on the show who was most involved in doing the titles. He was there in the studio with the musicians and kind of working out all the sound mixes. And he was very interested in talking about how it would animate. Roman Coppola was the other one that I would talk to, but mainly Jason would just get on the phone with me and get very excited about things. And I think it was his initial idea that these shapes that I was making in these compositions—the different shapes would correspond to different instruments. And so once he said that, I kind of ran with it. I'll show you the process of doing this. So this is some of the stuff I was looking at—record album covers—which were very helpful in terms of color palette, different kinds of shapes—how they overlap. I mean it's just stealing things, you know, but steal from a bunch of different places and hopefully it has some originality in the end.

So then at some point it was just time to start making them and they would send me the songs. So I had, you know... (plays musical track). So I would have that and then I would kind of just take a piece of paper. I mean, I've made music in the past, but I don't know how to read music—or I don't know enough to listen to an orchestral recording and know exactly which instrument is playing what. But I would just try to listen to like, (plays a couple notes) I would think of that—*dun dun dun dun...* that's some kind of low string sound, right? So I'd write 'low string' and then I would go (music continues) *four, du du dun dun dun... six...makes six marks on the paper*).

I just basically notated out each instrument and then I would have like a low string sound. I have a high string sound, you know, then I would have this paper that I would have basically—these are the amount of shapes that I need to create and here's how many times they do something.

It's just a very dumb way of doing it. But at the end you just have these notes. So these are kind of my low string sounds, which are sort of weird, but I would just make these drawings in Illustrator essentially. And then bring this as a composition into After Effects and animate each element onto the music. The higher notes are higher [compositionally] than the lower notes.



Teddy sketches on a piece of paper how he marked out the individual notes for *Mozart in the Jungle's* title sequence.

**A:** I mean, as a system, it just makes so much sense.

**T:** It was very much just like I made it up as it happened. It wasn't like I didn't do the system at first, but then by the time you get to episode four, five, and it's time—because I did deliver them in order and there was a schedule—and it was basically like, okay, we need episode one this day, and we need episode two this day, and I just went into a hole of, you know, trying to shut the world out and putting my headphones on and just working on this. And I'm not like a huge motion graphics/After Effects person. So a lot of it I'd learn. Once I had an idea for what I wanted to shape to do, if I didn't know how to do it, I just look it up and watch animation tutorials.

Halfway through doing them, there was some kind of instrument I couldn't make out. I couldn't make out how many times it happened. It was too low in the mix. But I still wanted to include it in the composition. And so I wrote the composer and said, "Is there any chance you have the recordings broken out track by track?" And he was like, "Of course I have that, I am the composer." (Both laugh). So then he gave me the stems, which is what they call it. So then I had (plays music). This is the full mix of episode five. But then I had just the harp (plays harp stem). I had already delivered episodes one through four at this point, so there was no going back and redoing them. But now, if you can single things out, you'll just hear subtleties that you don't hear before. And so the amount of stuff that I was able to turn from sound into image was just much bigger.

And as a result, the compositions got more and more complex as the season went on. So this composition, which I showed you was from that album cover—so that was one of the first compositions I had made. So it was like that could be this harp noise going all the way across.

And they would just all come on and then go off, and that sort of looks like the harp sounds as it goes across the screen. But then you go into episode five—let's listen to what the harp is doing in episode five (plays stem of harp). It's more constant and rhythmic.

**T:** I didn't know that was going to happen, but I already established just by having copied that album cover that harps are triangles, but now I need to figure out a way to make a harp kind of a constant thing rather than something that sweeps all the way across the screen. And so then I have the triangles but I can just sort of space them out, one at a time. And so then that gives you a whole other kind of thing to do with the composition.

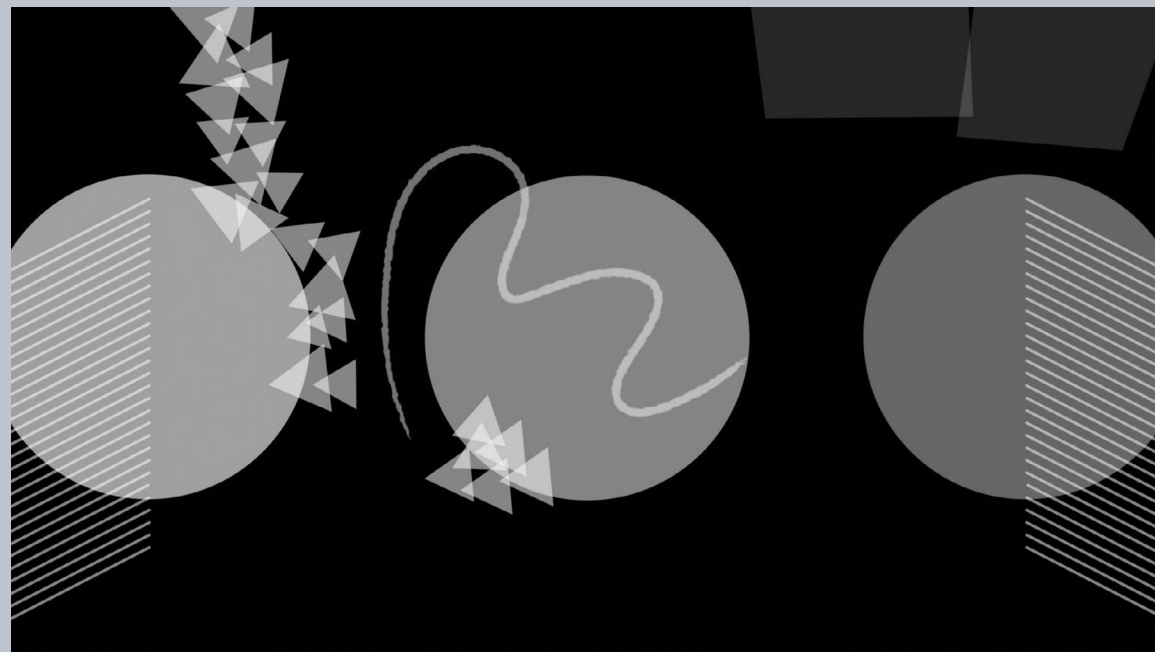
**A:** Nice. So you kept the instruments paired consistently.

**T:** Yes, the shapes and instruments are always the same. The only thing actually that's totally determined by just aesthetic preference is the color, which there's no rules. (Plays harp again) You know this trick if you hold down command? You can go through with the sound on, (demonstrates hitting command key, the instrument plays choppily).

**A:** Oh, I didn't know that.

**T:** So you can hear exactly when certain notes play—that's when I hit the first one (hits key). And then one there, marking out exactly when it hits. And then you have your markers throughout and you can animate the harp without listening to anything. It's hard with just some droney sounds like that. But, the great thing about this is that you can—especially on drums and stuff that has like piano hits—use it with things that have hard beats. You can just hear from one frame to the next...boom! The piano will just hit in. And so it's very easy to make the mark with this. This horn is kind of droney and even here, the way it comes in is sort of soft-ish. And so what I might do is this asterisk. (Taps asterisk five times to the beat of the music). I can sort of play it and then I have my markers here, too.

**A:** You said that you talked to the composer and actually get the sound files. Is that something that happens a lot when you're doing title sequences?



Still frame from *Mozart in the Jungle* title sequence, season 2

**T:** Not a lot. I mean, this was just so important. The music was so important and the way that the images correspond to the music was so important that it was almost like I needed to have a relationship with the composer. But for the most part it's not necessary. Shall we look at season four?

**A:** Sure.

**T:** I think the sort of handmade thing came from a desire of theirs. I think Roman Coppola specifically liked to have a more handmade looking thing this season. And the other thing to know is that the songs here were based on and using the same tracks that were recorded for season two.

But essentially they're remixes. (Plays music from season 4.) This is the remix, so you can hear it. There's like a weird filter on it.

So I think Jason Schwartzman worked with an electronic musician friend of his to create these—(plays another song) there's like a weirdness to it. It's the same orchestral performances, but it included with that some electronic noises. (Distorted harp comes in) It has this sort of echo-ey filter.

So I started thinking about these sounds and the sort of vaguely electronic scientific sounding stuff, and how they were playing around with sound waves. And so I was wondering whether it would be kind of interesting to take the idea of scientific imagery, or looking at these sound waves but using cut paper and sort of rudimentary-looking stop motion animation techniques to kind of create that scientific imagery. I was also thinking about how the brain responds to music. People like looking at the brain under in MRIs, so I started looking at MRI imagery and then asked myself, what does that look like when you try to make it out of cut paper? It's basically the same.

I mean, it's kind of the same approach as season two, where it was just coming up with a vocabulary of shapes and objects that I could then run with. Because at some point you come up with an initial logic, figure out the things you're going to really stick to and then let yourself just roam into weird directions.

The other difference here was that in season two, everything sort of made up one composition—you never left the frame. There were no cuts. Whereas in this case I would make six or seven different short compositions per sequence. So instead of just doing one composition, I would have to kind of break it up into shots. I would do that basically by listening to the music and figuring out when good cut points would be in the song. That way I can do the architecture of it, how it would cut together before I knew exactly what each shot was. That was the first thing I caught onto, was that these sort of sound waves are really good for that string motif—that kind of goes throughout all the songs, like, *duh nah nah nah nah*.

**A:** Right.

**T:** And you could very simply animate on the wave. And that just becomes this kind of basic thing of a sound wave. So that was the first thing I latched onto.

**A:** Would you bring these cut paper drawings essentially into After Effects?

**T:** Yeah. So the cut paperiness of it all is like a total illusion. They're just Illustrator things. There is a video I found of a sound wave that looked like it went along with it pretty well. And then I just took this on frame by frame into Photoshop and drew over it with charcoal-y looking brushes. Also there's a paper texture back here—like a background—and I would just be sliding it around or flipping it over so that you're seeing a different piece of it each time.

So then altogether when you're watching [the sequence], it looks like I made the drawings on paper, which might have actually been quicker. (Laughs.) Basically if the paper is wiggling with the shape at the same time, then it looks like the position has shifted as someone has tried to move it with their hands. So the overall effect is of a handmade thing. This is obviously way too smooth looking even still. So I would then export it at 12 frames a second rather than 24 frames a second and then it just comes out a little bit choppy looking.

**A:** Okay. Wow, that's so interesting.



Season 4 has a more handmade, cut-paper look, differing from season 2. Title for episode 4, shown.

**T:** So there are all of those little tricks. The easy part actually here was coming up with the initial thing, which is just me finding pictures Online or little videos of sound waves or whatever that I wanted to recreate. And then it's just like building the cut paper and all the textures and stuff over top it becomes incredibly time consuming.



Teddy busted out his After Effects files to demonstrate his animation process.

**T:** With both seasons, there was a little bit of tooling around with the first episode and what that looked like. And then once they were happy with the look and the feel of that, they let me just sort of make the rest of them.

**A:** Well, it seems like there are other projects too that you've done that sort of toggle between this digital and analog process.

**T:** I probably took a lot of the stuff that I learned using the for this particular season and applied at other things, although, what are you referring to?

**A:** Well, I watched a talk that you gave when you talked about putting titles on top of film.

**T:** Oh, you watched my talk? My first and only ever talk? I was so nervous. (Both laugh) It just came out online the other day.

**A:** So that's something I'm interested in too. In terms of this sort of toggle between digital and analog. Is that something you're into or does it just happen?

**T:** I definitely am more attracted to stuff that looks like it is made by non-computer, pre-digital, methods. And yet actually working within those methods is beyond my abilities. So it's just finding little tricks digitally to make things look like they're either handmade or made with old machinery. But that's hardly an innovation that I've made or anything. A lot of people try to make things look kind of vintage.

**T:** But the thing that I see that people always do wrong is to that they overdo it. The important thing to remember when like recreating a vintage look, or something done with a less precise piece of machinery than a Photoshop or illustrator is that no one back then who was using those methods was—they were trying to make it look as slick as possible, you know? Like they weren't trying to make it look crappy and all over the place. The thing is not to make it look so, so haphazard and so crazy overdone that it feels now like a parody of a vintage thing. When people are making a handmade animation, they're not trying to make the imperfections. They're trying to get it as perfect as possible. I find that if you start with something that is quote unquote "perfect" because it's made on a computer, and then just build in slight imperfections, it looks like a very carefully done handmade thing rather than like a handmade filter put on.

**A:** Right. So I'm actually really interested in your background in music—

**T:** Oh, please don't be (both laugh).

**A:** Can you talk a little bit about that in terms of where did it start and what instruments you play? I know you do a lot of mixing too...

**T:** I took piano lessons as a kid and then I then was in a band in high school and college, it was more of a duo, an electronic kind of a goofy thing—sort of like They Might Be Giants.

And then after the band broke up, I recorded a couple of solo albums. I made a last ditch effort at rock stardom then, but at that point I was sort of already well into my design career and I wasn't going to go tour or anything. And so I made the music, I made the album.

**A:** You've also done scores, right?

**T:** I have, yeah—I was out doing the score thing also when I was still kind of heavily involved in making my own music and pursuing that as the thing that I was interested in or wanted to do.

That's sort of the story of the story of how I got into doing film titles. It's the same as how I got into doing score. I didn't end up doing many film scores, but I knew Lena Dunham in college—she was making lots of little short films in college. I didn't go to school with her, but I was dating a friend of hers who went to Oberlin. And so I would go visit Oberlin and then became friends with Lena and she was making short films. And I would say, let me do the titles—let me do the music. And she did. And then she made what turned out to be a real movie, which is *Tiny Furniture*. And because I had worked on all of her sort of juvenalia before that, she just pulled me on board. And oddly she became very famous. (Both laugh.) It's very strange because of my association with that film. Also I was very excited to be a part of it.

As part of all the excitement surrounding it, I went to the South by Southwest Film Festival for the premiere of the film. And then I met a lot of other kinds of people in the indie film world, made friends.

**T:** Some of those people went on to make movies, pulled me on to do titles for theirs. And then it sort of snowballed. I mean, some of those friends would make their second, third movie and suddenly they're making movies for a studio—so that's how it started—just me kind of becoming a part of the indie film community.

And then once you work on someone's film, you become connected with the post-production supervisor. And that's the person who will call me the next time they're working on a TV show. It started for me with knowing the directors, and then it became knowing the post-production people, and then the producers. And for the most part those are the people that are bringing me onto jobs now. That's why whenever people ask me about how to get started doing film titles, I don't know what to tell them, except just like make friends with someone who then becomes very famous? I did not know that was going to happen, and yet it was very good for my career.

So I don't know what to say about it intelligently except that yes, for sure there is some connection between the music that I made and and the way that I see design as it relates to film in a time line. Titles coming on, coming off—I don't know exactly how or where the connection is, but the sense of rhythm, being able to—without knowing how to read music—come up with something like the *Mozart* thing, to pull the instruments apart and see them visually. I don't have synesthesia or anything like that. I don't like see red when I hear a fiddle or anything. But the way I made music was also with software—I use Logic and MIDI and programming and digital music, electronic music.

But the way I made music and the software you're looking at, it's still like a time line, and they're not frames with music, but you can see little things happen along the way. With MIDI literally it's a grid and the notes are lined up in the grid. You can move the notes around—there are definitely parallels, especially with the *Mozart* thing. There's a connection there for sure. But I don't know exactly how to articulate it. I mean, I'm sure you find the same thing yourself with having played instruments and like working with visual material.

**A:** Yeah. I think also I see a really strong correlation between music and typography as well, just considering the fact that it's like a notation system.

**T:** Because you actually read music?

**A:** I can read music okay. But when you think about the notation of music and then you think about type as being a translation of something auditory as well, where you're translating words onto paper and letterforms... I'm curious how you relate to type, since you work so much with type on screen.

**T:** That's really interesting. Because my experience with music notation ended after my piano lessons at age nine or whatever, I never looked at another actual sheet of music again. And I've never made a mental connection with typography and music, as typography shapes. But I think it's incredibly interesting and I think you're onto something for sure.

**A:** I'm also interested in your work with the *Spielbergs* project.

**T:** Oh yes. My directing.

**A:** And your work in film. I really enjoyed *Shrink*. It's so cool.

**T:** It's funny you mentioned the work; we're trying to pitch that as a podcast now.

**A:** Do it!

**T:** So I met Alex [Karpovsky] from *Tiny Furniture*, and then we really became close friends when I did the score for his movie *Red Flag* that he directed. So that band Tanlines—have you heard of them?

**A:** Only through the music video that you did.

**T:** Eric from Tanlines had always been told that he looked like Alex. And he knew I was friends with Alex, so they asked me if I would put them in touch with Alex about doing a music video. So the four of us ended up having dinner together one night and sort of together came up with this idea for the music video which was based on *Sliding Doors*—that Gwyneth Paltrow movie.

So we kind of came up with this concept where it would be *Sliding Doors*, but when he splits off it would be because his girlfriend walks out on him in a restaurant and one version goes and follows her, and the other version decides to remain single. So when one person gets her back, the other one like becomes a bachelor. But Alex would play the version of him that stayed and became a bachelor and we would intercut between what happened to Eric and what happened to Alex playing the other version of Eric. And because I was like really involved with coming up with this idea and the whole story for it, the next day Alex and I had lunch, he was like, do you want to direct this with me? I told him that would be great. I'd always wanted to learn how to direct stuff.



Alex Karpovsky and Natasha Lyonne in Tanlines' *Palace* video.

**T:** So we made that music video. It was just really fun. We just had a really good time and he had another music video job lined up after that. So we wrote another kind of kooky, wacky music video story for one. We did that, and then that led to another music video, and then we got signed with a commercial.

**A:** Oh, interesting.

**T:** And so we did a small handful of commercials together.

**A:** So when you're doing stuff like this and like *Shrink*—being on the other end where you're working with a cinematographer—did you come up with how to interview the people that were in those episodes? What's your approach to the interview process when making documentaries?

**T:** Alex and I kind of talked through what we were interested in—in general about therapy and about what people had learned through therapy. And so we came up with kind of a questionnaire essentially. It was not at all tailored to the specific people, but it was sort of just the ten questions we would want to ask anyone about their experience in therapy. And then how we chose the interview subjects was basically just to write an email to every famous or semi-famous person that we knew or knew someone who knew, and just see who answered. (Laughs.) So we cast a pretty wide net. Just with people that are like fairly well known for anything, you're better off having a personal sort of in with them somehow.

Alex is lucky to be a little bit well known himself. So he just runs in those circles. He knew Sarah Silverman, we had both worked with Natasha Lyonne because she was in that music video. And then subsequently Natasha had hired me to do some different design things for her.

**A:** You did *Russian Doll*, right?



Title treatment for the Netflix series *Russian Doll* starring Natasha Lyonne.

**T:** I did. Do you watch that?

**A:** Oh yeah. It's so good!

**T:** Oh man, it's so great. We would have this sort of questionnaire, and we would get on the phone with them like a week ahead of time and talk to them for about an hour and make a bunch of notes and record the phone call. And then we would listen to the phone call together. And with our notes, we teased out two or three stories that we thought were really interesting. Basically then we knew this is what we want to ask them about on the day. So then once we actually had them in front of the camera, we just asked directly about stuff that we already had spoken about before. But then if there were little diversions or something, or if they brought up something that we were interested in kind of going down that road, we would ask them to elaborate further. The other thing was—are you familiar with the Intertron?

**A:** No, what is an Intertron?

**T:** So it's actually attributed to having been invented by Errol Morris.

**A:** I'm obsessed with him.

**T:** What do you think about the fact that they won't release his new movie?

**A:** It's a bummer.

**T:** It's a real bummer, right? Just because it is about Steve Bannon?

**A:** Yeah. That seems to be a little crazy to me.

**T:** Me too. So he invented this, and now you can rent them. But the idea is this mirror goes over the lens. There's two cameras. One is pointed at you, the interviewer. And the other is pointed at the interviewee and in front of the lens, the interviewer can see the interviewee so that they look directly into the lens rather than to the left or the right.

Which, for the most part is where if you watch documentaries, mostly people's eyelines are off camera. But in Errol Morris movies, you'll notice right off, people are just staring straight into the lens. And the only way you can get people to do that without telling them to look into the lens is with the Intertron, and now they can actually look at you.

**A:** Oh, that's so nice.

**T:** It's really smart. We used an Intertron, which is why people are looking into the lens when they're doing it. So we had about an hour or two hours I think with each person. And then the idea was that we would kind of intercut each person's interview with abstract kind of b-roll footage, kind of inspired by Errol Morris. We shot them on a green screen and then we put in a different kind of therapist's office backdrops behind each person.

**T:** So I think we shot all the interviews first, and then we worked with this editor named Paul Zucker, who basically should get most of the credit for the show because he's the one who took these two hour interviews and cut them down into two minutes long. He deserves more credit than we do for finding the right two minutes of stuff to tell them. And this is mostly an editing job—I think as any documentary thing is—and we just kind of let him do it because he was really good. He did it on the Sarah Silverman one first and it was so good, and he got really into it and just had a real feel for it. So he would cut the interviews together. But you know, you need to have something to cut away to.

*(Sarah Silverman's voice enters: What are you risking, bombing? My name is Sarah Silverman and I have been in therapy on and off, um, well do I mean, do I count childhood?)*

**A:** And then were you directing these shots like the doll house?

**T:** Yes, so basically we had two days of shooting interviews—one in LA, one in New York—just because of the people that we were interviewing. And then we had maybe a couple of weeks off. And during that time, Paul cut everything together so we knew exactly what the interview said, and then Alex and I would watch them and basically free associate weird imagery we thought could go with each one. I can't remember exactly who came up with the idea that the image would be the doll house, and that we would have this little Sarah doll and she would be in different places in the house. Then I think with Lena Dunham we made a carpeted childhood bedroom with all of this stuff very meticulously organized all over it, because she talks about her obsessive compulsive disorder.

*(Lena Dunham's voice: Shoelaces, dogs, magazines that had been on a public rack. And finally my parents were just like...)*

**T:** And then this one gets pretty weird with putting a manuscript into a locked box. (Laughs.) If you like look at it for two seconds—he bought us just like a wooden box that the production designer put this lock onto because—what? Why would it have like this little cover? It makes no sense. (Both burst into laughter.)

You don't like think about it when you first look at it, but it actually makes no sense at all. So we would just come up with these kind of ideas for props that we wanted to shoot. And then we had one full day of shooting. At that point we knew exactly what we needed. We had built into each episode a prop here, we cut to a prop here. And both because those were good places to do it also because those were the places where we needed to cover up dialogue that was stitched from one part of the interview to another. And then by that point the episodes are done.

**A:** It seems like props play a big role in your work as well—fictional props.

**T:** Oh, in the Spielberg's work? That's true for sure.



Props for comedian Sarah Silverman's episode in *Shrink* features a Sarah doll in different doll house scenes.



Teddy points out the hilarious prop lock used in writer Gary Shteyngart's episode.

**A:** But also your book covers that you designed.

**T:** Oh yeah, for Alex Ross Perry.

**A:** I'm really curious about what you see as fictional world-building or storytelling and its relationship to something like this, which is more documentary-type of work.

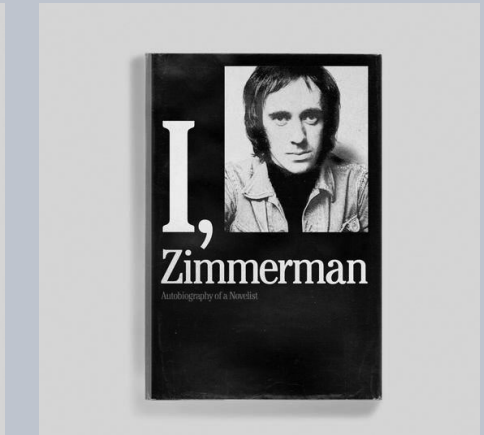
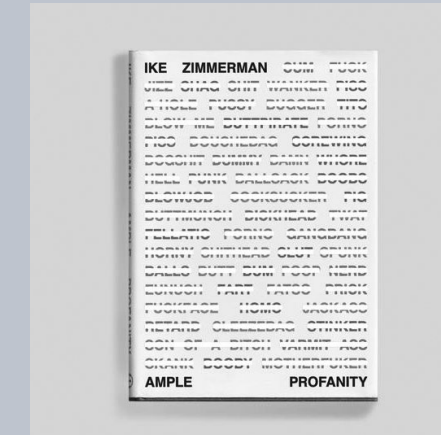
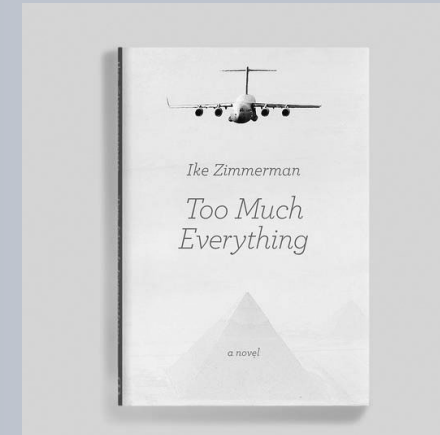
**T:** Well I'll say the fictional world-building stuff is certainly something that I'm getting into a little bit in artwork. This sort of thing came really out of Alex Ross Perry and that movie *Listen Up, Philip*, and then set my subsequent work on his other films. He hired me to do those book covers, and I'm so into that vintage-type look. It was really fun for me to create them, so I went kind of overboard with it. We always find a way to work in a new one to any of his new movies. So there's always a new book by that author.

**A:** I love that so much.

**T:** It's so fun. But I don't know that I have anything interesting to say about my relationship to it perhaps it except for that he has just in a really fun way provided me with an opportunity to make them, and they're really fun to do. It's really fun to make fake things that seem real.

**A:** Well, it also seems like you did that with *Nerve*?

**T:** That's true. I mean now that you're looking at it... I much prefer to be slavishly recreating an existing look, or doing mimicry. I mean to me, the crazy amount of things that you can do with type and image and combining them—you know, whatever the definition of graphic design is—the idea of just creating something with those things out of scratch seems almost too daunting sometimes. I never know if I did it right. But with mimicry, when you're just kind of trying to make something look like something that already exists—like, oh, can I just kind of make this look like a photograph of a newspaper? How close can I really get to the real-looking thing? There's just so much satisfaction in having done it right, because you know when you've done it right, because you've seen a photograph and a newspaper.



A selection of Teddy's book cover designs written by fictional character Ike Zimmerman in the film *Listen Up, Philip*.

**T:** Whereas if you're just designing something new, you have to rely on your own taste or something, which is more difficult. Like if the idea of making a fake newspaper for the cover of this podcast is a good idea—and I don't know if it is—I know that I've executed it well because I know what a newspaper looks like.

**A:** Exactly (both laugh).

**T:** You know, it's just about getting all the details right, like the paper texture and the way the type is laid out and how much it costs. And the little tagline. It's all fun.

**A:** So I've heard that you have said in the past that you'd love to make like a full length film at some point. Is that what's next for you?

**T:** It's certainly something I want to do. I definitely want to keep making stuff with Alex, but I'd like to try my hand at directing alone, which I haven't done before. It's really just a matter of my finding time to write something. I have started on things—my wife Molly and I started writing a screenplay last year. I would love to do that. We'll see. The filmmaking thing is so hard because you can't just make it yourself, which is so much of what I do—I'm able to just sit in front of a computer and start making things. It's just great to have an idea and then execute it, and then you have it—and it's an image or it's an animation or whatever it is.

Filmmaking on the scale that I'm interested in doing it—like narrative storytelling—I think it's definitely like you need people to give you money to do it right. And you need to work with really talented people. I have no aptitude for photography or cinematography myself. I know what images I think look good and I know things about composition, but not about lenses, and I would never want to shoot something myself. It's hard. It's a lot of waiting around and a lot of trying to get other people excited about a story you're excited about.



**T:** And that's why if my only career were just trying to do commercials or make TV stuff with Alex, and I didn't have design as a mostly full-time thing that I can do, it would drive me crazy. I think having a craft or a trade is so helpful in terms of whatever artistic ambition I have on the side. But then it also probably holds you back from going at it straight on. So it's probably a double-edged sword.

**A:** Well, I think it's awesome that you're doing so much multidisciplinary work—in terms of working as a designer, and also doing work in film and directing.

**T:** Oh, thank you. I do find it's like you get stuck doing one thing too much. I guess you sort of appreciate it more when you're off doing something else. Then you get back to the other thing. You get less tired of it or something. I think I've always had that kind of restless thing.

**A:** That's awesome. I hope to do that too, once I'm out of school—that I'll still be able to manage my multiple interests.

**T:** I'm sure you will. It's great to have the time to kind of think about what that ideal scenario will be for you. That's what's so great about the grad school thing—you're just able to kind of figure out what those interests are. And then you kind of have a plan when you're going for it.



Teddy in his Brooklyn studio at CHIPS.

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