

L - N E

LINE_053

STEVE RODEN

ON LOWERCASE AFFINITIES AND *FORMS OF PAPER*



forms of paper was created for the exhibition 'six degrees - art in the libraries'—a group exhibition of site specific works for public libraries around los angeles. the soundwork was created using electronically manipulated sounds of book pages being rubbed, scraped, turned, etc. 8 speakers were placed on a small pedestal in an atrium in a hollywood branch of the library, along with a series of paper 'drawings' made from discarded library books. the work was playing very softly within the library space continuously for one month.

— steve roden, 2001

AZEOTROPES

The following two tables contain data for some binary and ternary systems which exhibit constant boiling points. The boiling points of the compounds in the systems as well as those of the azeotropes are given.

BINARY SYSTEM

No.	Compounds	R.P., °C	B.P., °C	Volatility	Boiling point of pure substance at 760 mm Hg	Spec. grav. at 20°C
				In solution		
				Upper	Lower	
1	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
2	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
3	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
4	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
5	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
6	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
7	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
8	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
9	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
10	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
11	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
12	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
13	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
14	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
15	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
16	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
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25	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
26	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
27	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
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80	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
81	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
82	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
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84	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
85	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
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87	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
88	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
89	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
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94	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
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96	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
97	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
98	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
99	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792
100	Acetamide	31.0	20.5	22.5	22.5	0.792

AZEOTROPES

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BINARY SYSTEM

26	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	110.1 117.0	34.5 58.5	
27	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	118.1 118.1	56.0 24.9	0.882
28	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	115.5 115.5	65.0 25.0	1.021
29	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	107.4 61.5	25.8 61.5	
30	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	113.1 87.0	3.5 56.2	
31	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	110.5 105.4	72.0 27.0	0.903
32	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	113.1 83.5	143.0 31.0	1.023
33	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	113.4 113.4	27.0 27.0	
34	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	110.0 56.0	5.0 14.0	
35	Acetic acid n-Butylalcohol	109.6 56.6	14.0 14.0	

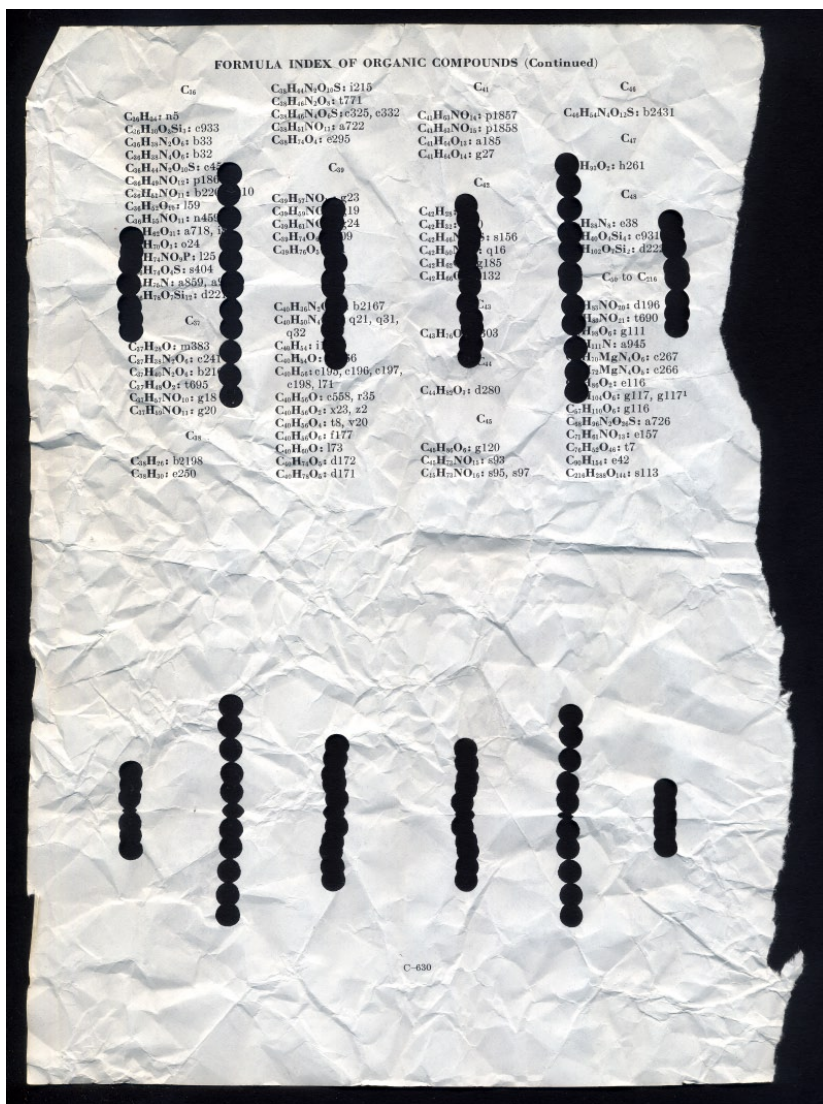
10 years after the initial installation and subsequent CD release of *Forms of Paper*, the short text I wrote in 2001 seems cryptic at best; for the piece involved not only a number of shifts in my own work (it was the first piece I'd ever recorded and composed using a computer), but was the beginning of the dissemination of the term 'lowercase' to describe a kind of music.

During the late 1980's computers were not exactly alien to me, but in terms of music and computers, my experiences were limited to a midi-based program called Performer—which I used for 4 or 5 years. at the time, I was trying to compose with synthesizers, and adding live sounds over them. Performer seemed ideal because it not only allowed the computer and synths to talk to each other, but was also able to (once in awhile when it actually worked!) sync everything up to an 8 track tape machine. At the time, the computer/tape deck relationship was fraught with problems, and after much frustration I went back to working with tape, leaving the computer and everything midi based behind—which was a blessing in disguise most certainly.

I met Bernhard Günter in 1997 when he came to Los Angeles for a performance at Beyond Baroque. He visited an exhibition of my visual work, and so we began corresponding regularly. In 2000, he released a CD of my work on his label Trente Oiseaux, and in 2001, while teaching in France, I was able to spend a few days at his home in Koblenz, where we spoke extensively about composing and sound. At the time, he was using Pro-Tools not only as a recording studio, but also a composing tool; and while I was extremely reluctant to approach the computer again for my own work, he patiently walked me through the program and encouraged me in no small way to use Pro Tools, and to start to work again with the computer. Thus, upon my arrival home, I got my hands on a copy of Pro Tools and started to learn how to use the program.

At the time, the computer and myself were hardly friends (and in truth, our relationship is still quite strained), but because I had already been using various Mac based graphic design programs: Quark Express, Photoshop, etc. for freelance work, I was somewhat familiar with Pro Tools' interface. The final push came with the annual breakdown of my Fostex 8-track, leaving me to decide whether I wanted to be without a recorder for a few months while it was out for repairs (again!), or dive into Pro Tools wholeheartedly. Had I truly understood at the time that I could simply have used Pro Tools to replace my dead multi-track tape recorder, it might've been a much easier transition. But regardless, I decided to enter the realm of the computer...

I should mention that even now, many years later, my knowledge of how to use the Pro Tools and its plug-ins is still quite rudimentary; and as a user of mainly guitar pedals for processing, I know next to nothing of how most of the plug-ins are supposed to be used. In the beginning, I was frustrated by the lack of tactility (i.e. no knobs to turn) and so I ended up processing sounds mainly in two ways, via pitch shift, and equalization. As with the rest of my work, I was looking for limited choices rather than limitless ones, and so I decided to use only the plug-ins that came free with the program. (Certainly inspired by Brian Eno, who often spoke at the time of his interest, early on, in using only the pre-sets that came with his DX7).

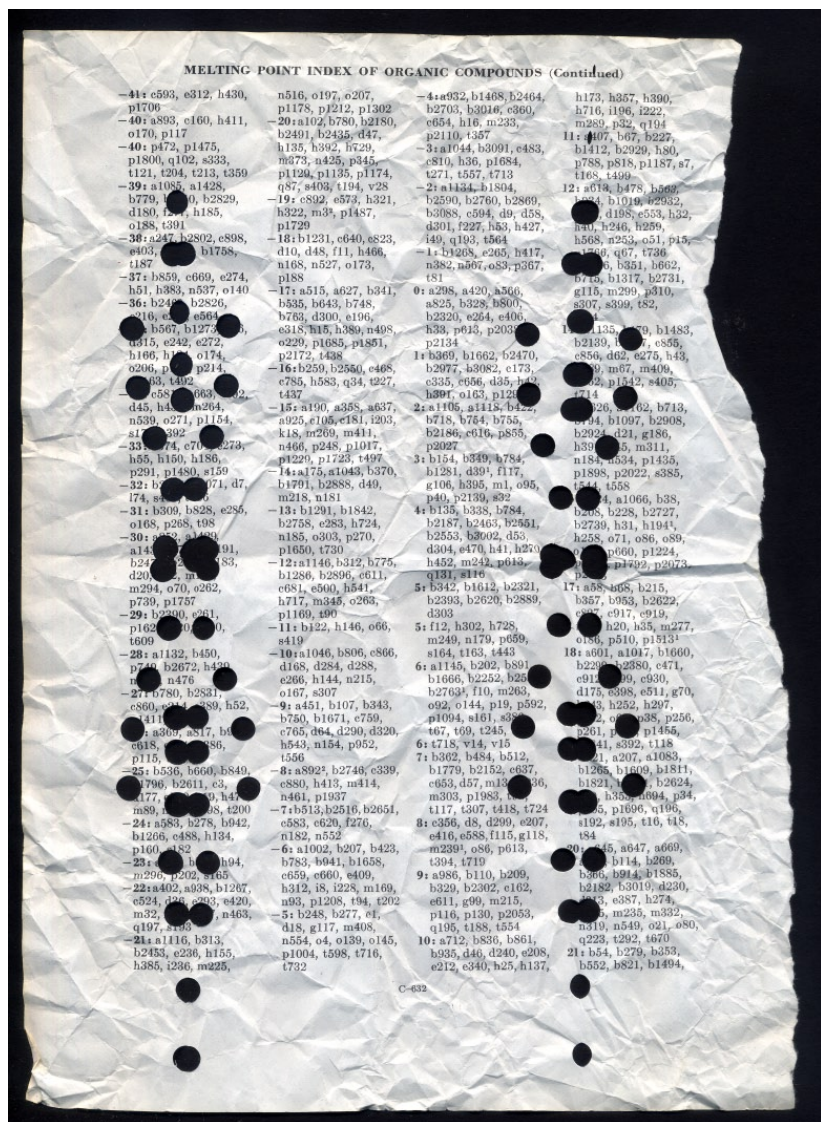


After figuring out ways to enable the plug-ins to get a little confused, the standard Pro Tools EQ became one of my favorite tools, because it tended to offer surprising results, mainly when running a fragment of sound through the same EQ setting over and over again like a feedback loop, until it sounded nothing like the original. While the results might have been logical to the computer (or an operator who knew more than I did), my limited technical knowledge of sound equalization allowed the transformation to evoke a sense of wonder—the process seemed like a kind of alchemy.

At this time, my general composition and recording technique was to record various short performances into an Akai mono sampler, using a mic or a contact mic to generate 15-20 seconds of sound. I would then edit the recording into a nice short loop, and trigger the sample via a midi keyboard so that I could shift the pitch and speed of the loop by moving my hands along the fake piano keyboard. these loops were then recorded into Pro Tools as if I were simply recording on a multi-track tape deck.

When I recorded *Forms of Paper*, I used both regular and contact mics to sample a variety of “performances” using my hands and the pages of a book. The way that I built the piece in Pro Tools was pretty much the same as if I was still using a tape deck, but at the same time I wanted to exploit certain aspects of the computer that I could not approach with a tape deck, such as: cut and paste, a certain kind of repetition, and much of the approach to mixing. Even so, I would say that, at best, my embrace of this new tool carried was tempered by a heap of reluctance.

I’m not sure whose idea it was to include a sound artist in a series of exhibitions in Los Angeles libraries, but nonetheless, I was given an atrium space to work with at a large Hollywood Branch Library. I ended up using a low flat pedestal, the size of a big coffee table, which I covered in modified pages from a discarded science book. the pages were modified by folding them up into small squares and punching holes in them to create dot patterns that, when unfolded, resembled archaic rorschach ink blots (i.e. they contained a lot of mirror imaging). The speakers rested upon the layer of modified papers, playing a quiet composition that was soft enough that the sound never reached the upstairs area, which was the main portion of the reading spaces. While no one ever complained about the sound being distracting, one person did offer an anonymous response in the form of collaboration by inserting a small Chinese electronic toy which made cricket sounds in a bookcase close enough to the installation that both could be heard at the same time.



Originally coined by minimal artist Steve Roden, 'lowercase' is an extreme form of ambient minimalism in which very quiet sounds bookend long stretches of silence. Roden started the movement with an album entitled *Forms of Paper*, in which he made recordings of himself handling paper in various ways. These recordings were actually commissioned by the Hollywood branch of the Los Angeles Public Library.

— Wikipedia

VS.

The term [lowercase] is associated with Steve Roden who suggests that the genre "bears a certain sense of quiet and humility; it doesn't demand attention, it must be discovered... It's the opposite of capital letters—loud things which draw attention to themselves."

— Electro Acoustic Research site

Around 2001, the term "lowercase" truly entered the fray. While I had been tagged as being the originator of the term, I never intended the phrase to describe (or worse, to define) a kind of music. When Rob Young interviewed me for the first time in 1997 for *The Wire*, I mentioned that my artistic tendencies were "lowercase". I had been using this phrase since the mid-1980's to set my work apart from the bombastic nature of painting at the time via artists like Julian Schnabel. While the artworld and popular culture seemed to favor spectacle, I was interested in silence, humility, intimacy, and thus began to describe my work as having a lowercase aesthetic—and I viewed the term as a quiet form of protest.

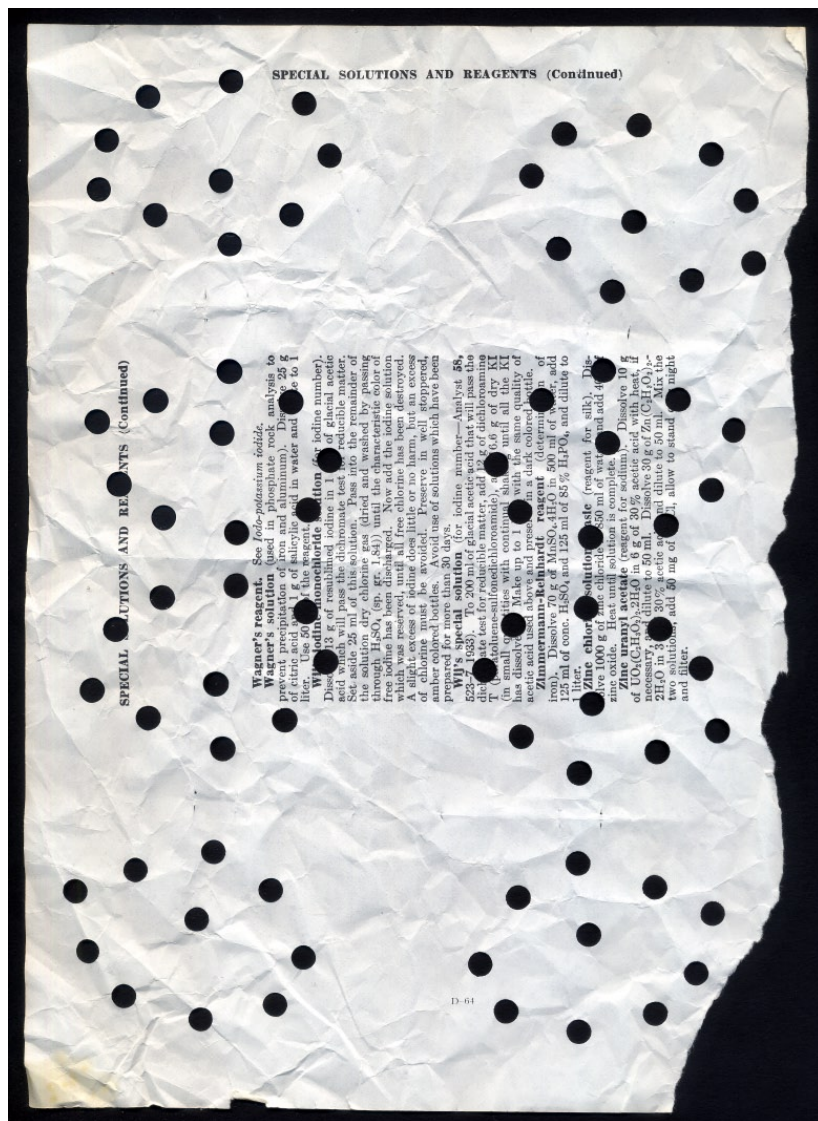
When I discovered Agnes Martin's writings around 1990, they seemed to offer a potential outside of the way artists and culture were speaking at the time, and by the mid-1990's I had gone back to one of the biggest influences on me—a section from Rilke's letters to a young poet, in which he discusses so-called "inconsiderable things". For Rilke, inconsiderable things were object or sounds or forces that were so subtle they could only noticed or experienced by a perceptive and sensitive soul—and like Martin's writings, Rilke's inconsiderable things favored intuition over academic thinking—suggesting the potential power of a subtle whispering voice. In so many ways, the word lowercase simply felt like an antidote to the prevailing uppercase aesthetic.

After *The Wire* article, the term was no longer my own. Somehow, within the then relatively small experimental music scene, a group of artists found sympathy with the term and adopted it in relation to their own work, and eventually it began to infiltrate a number of different music scenes. I certainly never expected the term would be used by anyone else, nor was it ever my intention for it to define a kind of music. In fact, I never saw it as a rigid term, nor one that would be anything other than open. The funny thing is that my own work has never been interested in the kind of extremes suggested by Wikipedia, and long silences have never been part of my work (although low volume and quiet sounds have), and I have always favored quiet activity and drone rather than true pauses or silence.

Unlike the Wikipedia entry, the definition from the Electro Acoustic Research Site printed above, is an actual quote by me, although those words were most certainly spoken in relation to my own work, rather than attempting to define a genre or a kind of music.

FORMULA INDEX OF ORGANIC COMPOUNDS (Continued)

$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{ClO}_2$: a365, a366, a371, b2725, b2729, b2733, f164, f165, p1379, p1393, p1400	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{Cl}_2\text{NO}_2$: h597, h598	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{ClO}_2$: a53, c220	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{F}$: e676	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{FO}_2$: h462	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{I}$: e655	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{IN}_2\text{O}_2$: u91	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{N}$: a816, b2182, b2578, b2775, h438, p147, p295	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}$: e786, h440, p1028, p1578, p2170, p2171	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_2$: a65, b3019, c692, h412, m409, p1030, p1307	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_3$: h333, c279	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_4$: h397, p1506	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_5$: g35	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NS}$: i232, i235, i176	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_2\text{O}$: e430, t737	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{N}_2$: b197	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{N}_2\text{Br}$: b2983, b2984, b2985, b2987, c591, c634, c676, h547, h548, h549, h550, p410, p411, p412, p413, p414, p415, p416, p417	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{BrF}$: h329	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{BrNO}$: b2711, p246	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{Br}_2$: h347	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{ClF}$: h338	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{ClNO}$: a321, c322, c323, a343	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{ClNO}_2$: a355	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{Cl}_2$: b2543, b2544, h348, h349, h350, h351, h352, h353, h354	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{ClO}$: e498, c529, c530, c531, c532	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{ClO}_2$: a20, a35, c181, f108	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{Cl}_2\text{Si}$: s333, s334	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{Cl}_2\text{N}$: a932	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{Cl}_2$: h357	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{N}_2$: g153, h645, p1050	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_2$: h381, h414, c258	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_3$: a757, p1335	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_4$: e123, c127, h367, h712, h714, c290	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_5$: h10, h11, h12, h13	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_6$: e941, c942, c943, c944	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{N}_2\text{Si}$: s300	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{N}_2\text{S}_2$: d227	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{N}_4$: h315	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{O}$: b2478, b2921, c742, e430, e435, e448, e537, f210, h316, h317, h515, h527, h571, h575, p80, p364, p365, p366, p435, p436	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{O}_2$: a178, a180, a181, a182, a215, b2669, b2760, b2763, b2809, c723, c725, c726, d36, f142, f145, h479, h480, h481, h482, h483, h484, h485, h486, h487, h488, h489, h490, h491, h492, h493, h494, h495, h496, h497, h498, h499, h500, h501, h502, h503, h504, h505, h506, h507, h508, h509, h510, h511, h512, h513, h514, h515, h516, h517, h518, h519, h520, h521, h522, h523, h524, h525, h526, h527, h528, h529, h530, h531, h532, h533, h534, h535, h536, h537, h538, h539, h540, h541, h542, h543, h544, h545, h546, h547, h548, h549, h550, h551, h552, h553, h554, h555, h556, h557, h558, h559, h560, h561, h562, h563, h564, h565, h566, h567, h568, h569, h570, h571, h572, h573, h574, 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Forms of Paper was released in 2001 and was my first release for LINE. I sent the final mix to Taylor Deupree a few weeks before 9/11, but because I was traveling at the time I wasn't able to hear the mastered track until the CDs had been manufactured. Truth be told, the first time I heard it, I was not happy. Because I tended to mix my own work at a relatively quiet level, the mastering process necessitated upping the gain, which brought out a number of sounds that I had never even heard. The disc sounded relatively ok at a very very low volume, but if anyone listened to it at a normal listening volume or on headphones, it wasn't the piece I'd intended at all. This was one of many situations revealing to me the obvious—that the technical side of things will never be my strong suit. nonetheless, I ended up blaming the computer, because I had never experienced such problems with tape.

It didn't help that people seemed to really like the disc, many suggesting it was my best, which culminated in a review in *The Wire* stating that "*Forms of Paper* unfolds from a nominally two dimensional plane into a space shot through with hidden depths and cavities, each one a wormhole leading to a realm as full of possibility as silence itself." Somehow, the CD that I considered to be somewhat of a failure, was embraced by a lot of people as being my best...

A few months later I went on tour with Bernhard Günter. We performed in LA, and New Mexico—as well as visiting the Grand Canyon together. I told him about my unhappiness with the CD and the extraneous noises, as well as a lack of warmth; and he immediately offered to remaster it for me so at least I would have a copy in my archives that was closer to how I wanted the piece to sound. While I had no interest in the piece ever being re-released, I gave him a copy of my final mix and a few months later he sent back his take, which sounded a thousand times better.

Last year, Richard Chartier began to ask about re-releasing *Forms of Paper* as a high quality download, but I continually turned him down; and until a few months ago, I had not listened to the piece since the year it was released... and truthfully, up until last year I had zero interest in sending it back out into the world—even in its proper form. Then, while planning my current LINE release, Richard asked again.

When I realized that October 2011 would be the 10 year anniversary of *Forms of Paper's* initial release, it seemed time a good time to reconsider—particularly because I have gotten more requests for a copy of *Forms of Paper* than any of my other releases, I decided to finally re-listen to Bernhard's remastered... and remarkably—with all of the distance between us—this piece of mine and me, seemed to feel as if we might finally be able to get along.

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