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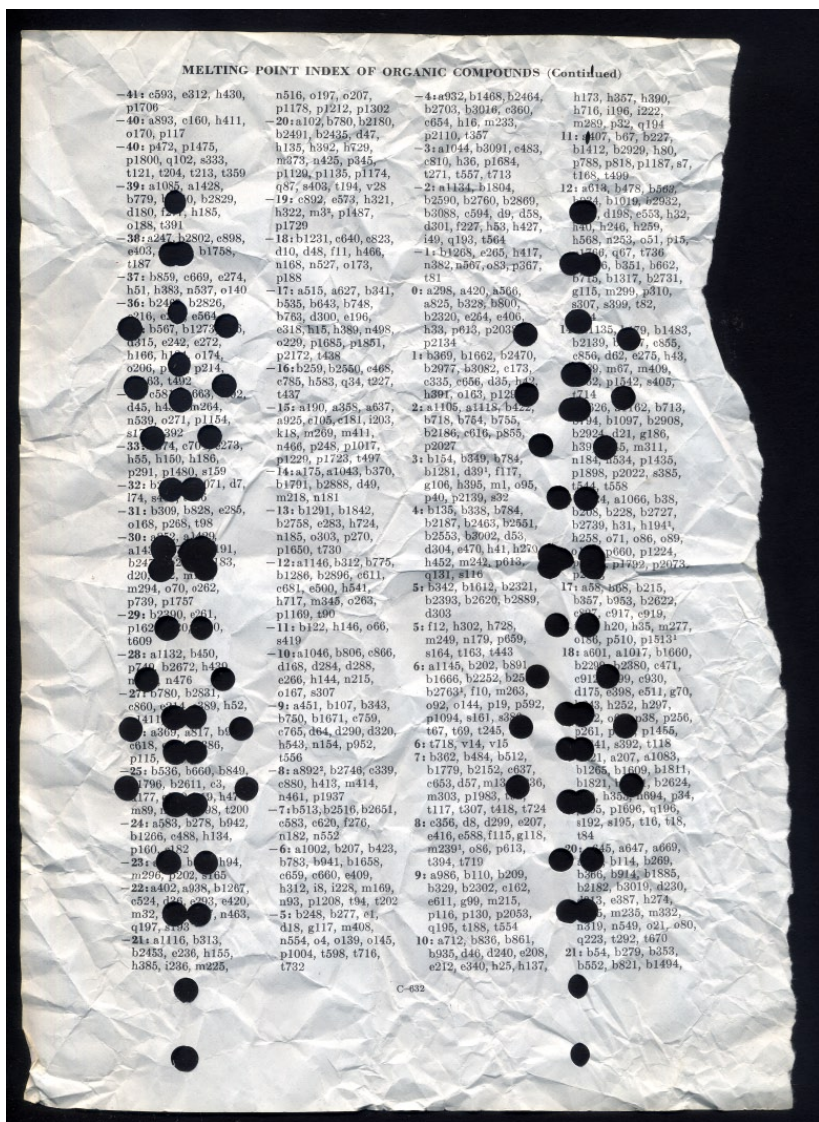
STEVE RODEN

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



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.

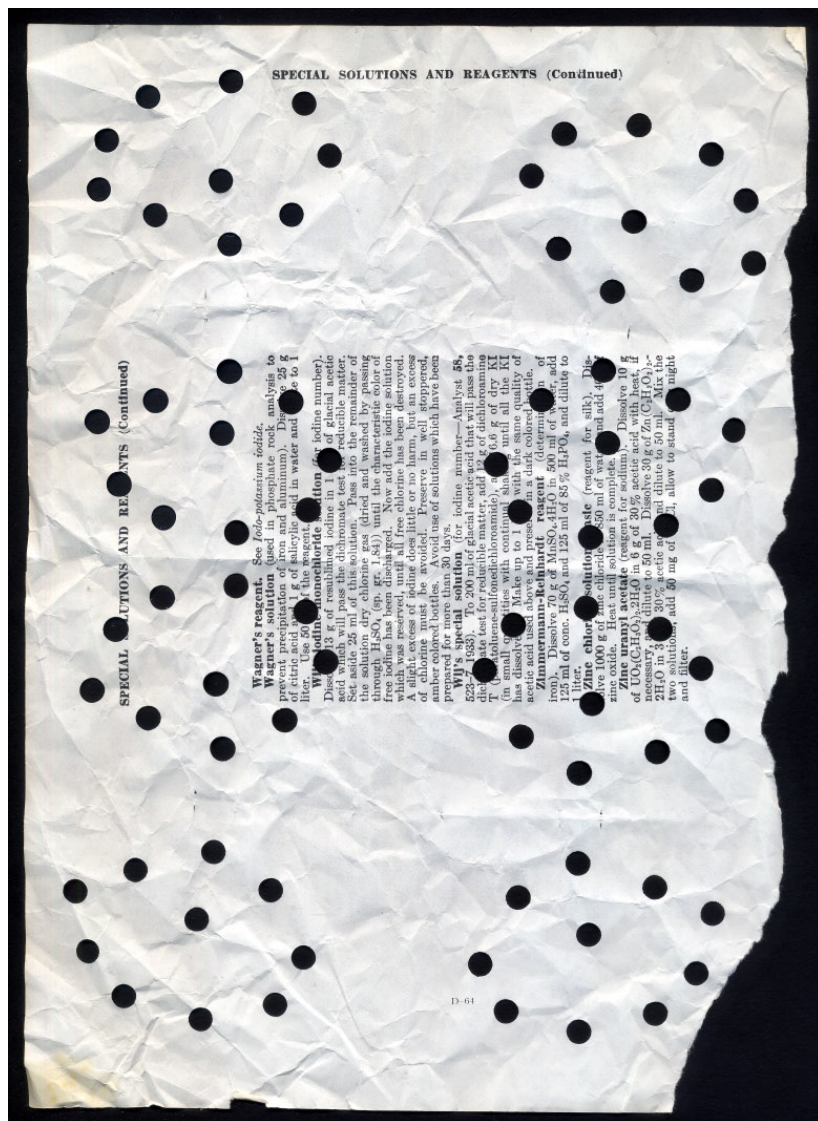
When I discovered Agnes Martin's writings around 1990, they seemed to offer a potential outside of the way artists and culture were speaking at the time, and by the mid-1990's I had gone back to one of the biggest influences on me—a section from Rilke's letters to a young poet, in which he discusses 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	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{NO}_2$: e430, i737	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{N}_2$: b107	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{N}_2\text{Br}$: 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	$\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{BrNO}_2$: 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, c537, 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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