

<https://youtu.be/GkFWxQWQp1Y>

Flowing Identities

Water / Data / Residue
Across RCA Final Project



Keywords

Body / Identity / Flow / Trace / Translation

Short text

A moving-image project exploring how body, identity, and digital traces circulate, become recorded, and leave consequences across systems through the lenses of water, data, and residue.

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Team Introduction

This project was developed collaboratively by team members from different backgrounds, contributing to research, visual development, and final video production.

- Xiao Chen 10067313 Design Futures
Director/Sound Design/Concept/Editing

- Zijing Li 10061800 Intelligent mobility
Moving image/Concept

- Ran Huo 10065245 print
Cinematography/Concept / storytelling

- Yiyang Yuan 10051119 fashion
visual composition / installation thinking / digital aesthetics



Project Overview

Starting point

Body and identity within Being Digital

Project pathway

Focus

- How flow happens
- How data records
- How residue forms
- How identity is continuously shaped through systems

One-line summary.

Identity is not fixed, but continuously formed through flow, recording, and sedimentation.

This project uses moving image to explore how water, data, and residue reveal identity as something relational, recorded, and continuously reshaped by external systems.



- Issue: how material flow and digital recording shape identity
- Critical question: how do water, data, and residue reshape body and identity?



Law of Conservation of Matter

Matter is neither created nor destroyed; it only transforms.

Why Water?

- No fixed form
- Always in circulation
- Dependent on environment, containers, and infrastructures
- Never truly disappears, only transforms

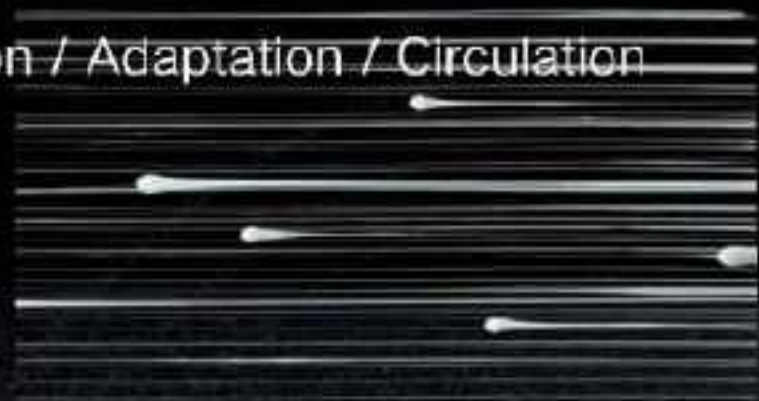
Why it matters

Water helps us understand that existence is not static, but continuously produced through flow, transfer, and transformation.

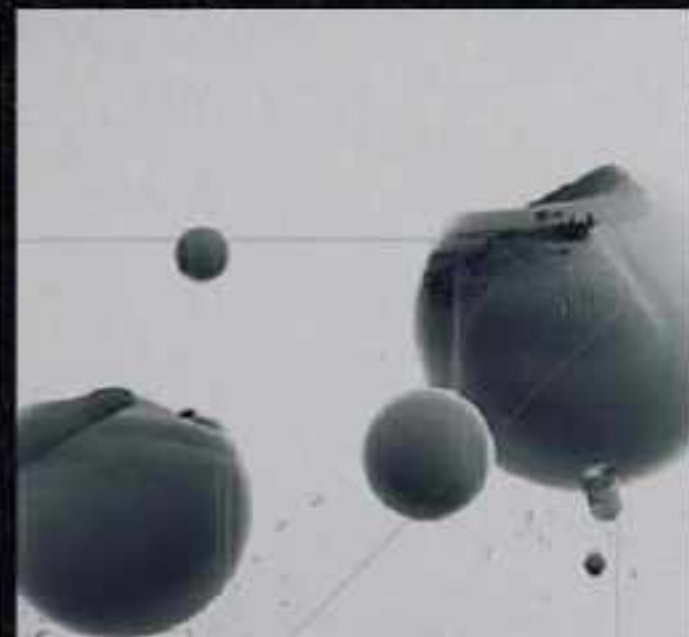
Water becomes the starting point of the project not only as a material, but as a mode of existence: without fixed boundaries, yet always leaving effects.

Keywords

Flow / Transformation / Adaptation / Circulation



Water is used here as a metaphor for relational identity: like water, identity is shaped by conditions, infrastructures, and forces external to the self.



Water

In this project, water is:

- a flowing material
- a medium within systems
- a metaphor for identity

Characteristics of water

- no fixed boundaries
- shaped by environment
- guided by pathways
- persists through circulation

Project relevance

Water helps us rethink identity

not as fixed,
but as something continuously transformed by conditions.

If water flows through infrastructures in the physical world,
is there an equivalent form of flow in digital systems?



From Water to Data

If water helps us understand how matter flows, data helps us understand how information flows.

Although one is material and the other is digital, they share similar systemic qualities:

- both depend on infrastructures
- both move through pathways
- both are stored, transferred, and controlled in motion
- both may appear invisible, yet deeply shape everyday life

How we understand data

- more than information
- a digital record left by bodily action
- closely tied to devices, platforms, and algorithms
- involved in identification, classification, and prediction

Why move from water to data?

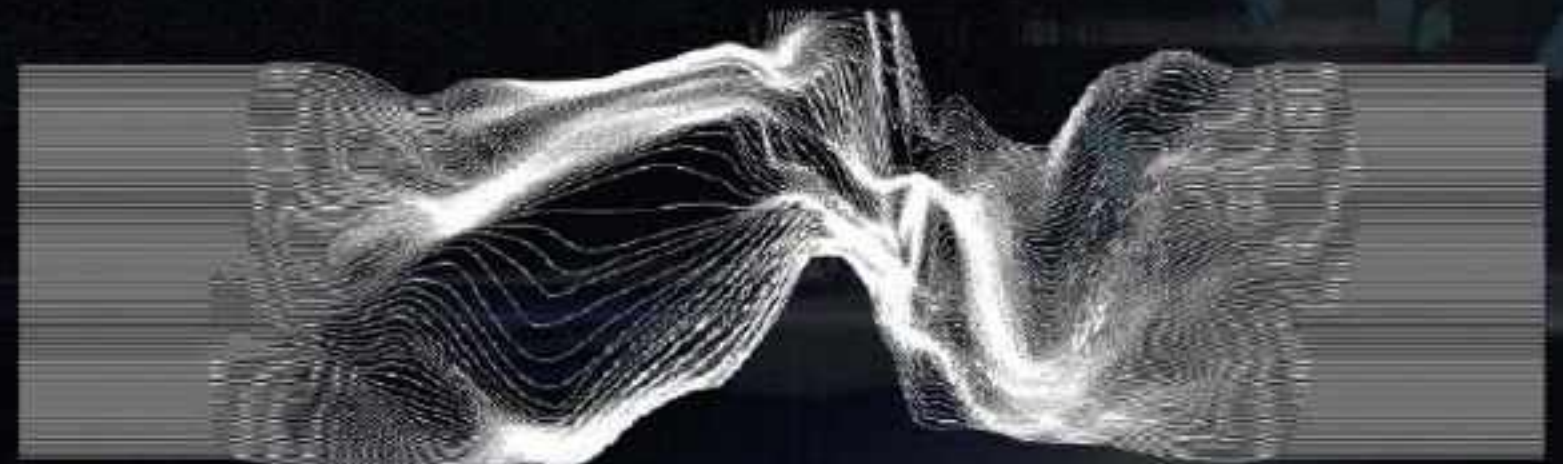
Because they share a similar logic of flow.

Shared qualities

- both circulate
- both depend on infrastructures
- both are stored and transmitted
- both are organised and controlled by systems

Key insight

Data extends flow from the material level into the digital one. As recording accumulates, residue begins to emerge.



From Water + Data to Residue

Water does not completely disappear after moving.

It may leave:

- stains
- sediment
- particles
- contaminated remains

Data functions in a similar way.

After being generated, transmitted, and used, it does not fully vanish, but leaves behind:

- browsing history
- cache
- platform profiles
- historical traces
- retained and reusable digital leftovers

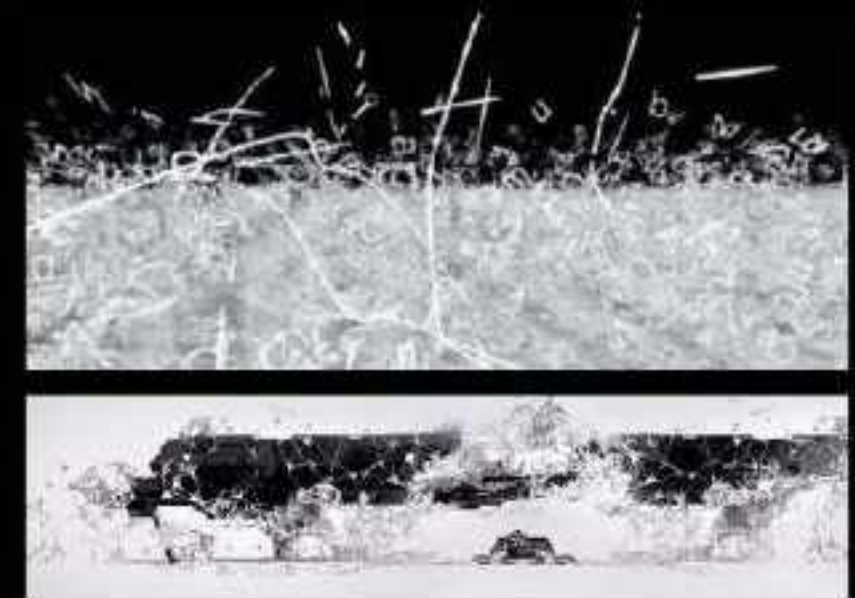
Residue is therefore not only a material concept, nor only a digital one. It is the consequence jointly produced by water and data after systems operate.

Key shift

Flow never ends without marks.
Recording never fully disappears.
This is where residue begins.



Stains/sediments left after water flow



Digital Residue



Digital afterimage

Residue

In this project, residue is:

- the trace left after flow
- what cannot be fully erased after recording
- the consequence and evidence of system operation
- a persistent state between presence and disappearance

It can be

- material: stains, sediment, particles
- digital: cache, records, preferences, historical traces

Key significance

Residue makes invisible processes visible, and allows identity to be understood as something that leaves marks.



Research Question

If:

- water exists through flow
- data exists through recording
- residue persists as trace

Then:

Should identity also be understood not as fixed, but as a temporary formation produced through flow, recording, and sedimentation?

Core proposition

Identity is not fixed.

It is formed through flow, recording, and residue.



Audience, Intention and Open Questions

Who is this for?

This work is for audiences who live within digital systems but rarely pause to reflect on how identity is shaped by flow, infrastructure, recording, and trace.

What do we want the audience to think or feel?

We want the audience to sense identity as something relational rather than fixed, and to feel that what appears to disappear may continue to exist as trace.

Open Questions

- If water is shaped by external conditions, is identity also relationally shaped by systems outside the self?
- If data records our actions, what forms of self are left behind as residue?
- If the digital seems immaterial, what material infrastructures make that fluidity possible?



Conceptual Framework

To understand how water, data, and residue collectively shape identity, this project develops a framework built around several core concepts:

- Flow: movement is not an exception, but a basic mode of existence
- Infrastructure: all flows depend on pathways, containers, platforms, and systems
- Recording: digital flow is never only movement, but also recording
- Trace: flow and recording always leave marks behind
- Body and Identity: the body is both a sensing subject and an interface through which data is produced and identity is defined

Through this framework, identity is no longer approached as a fixed label, but as a process continuously formed through flow, recording, and residue.



Methods and Experiments

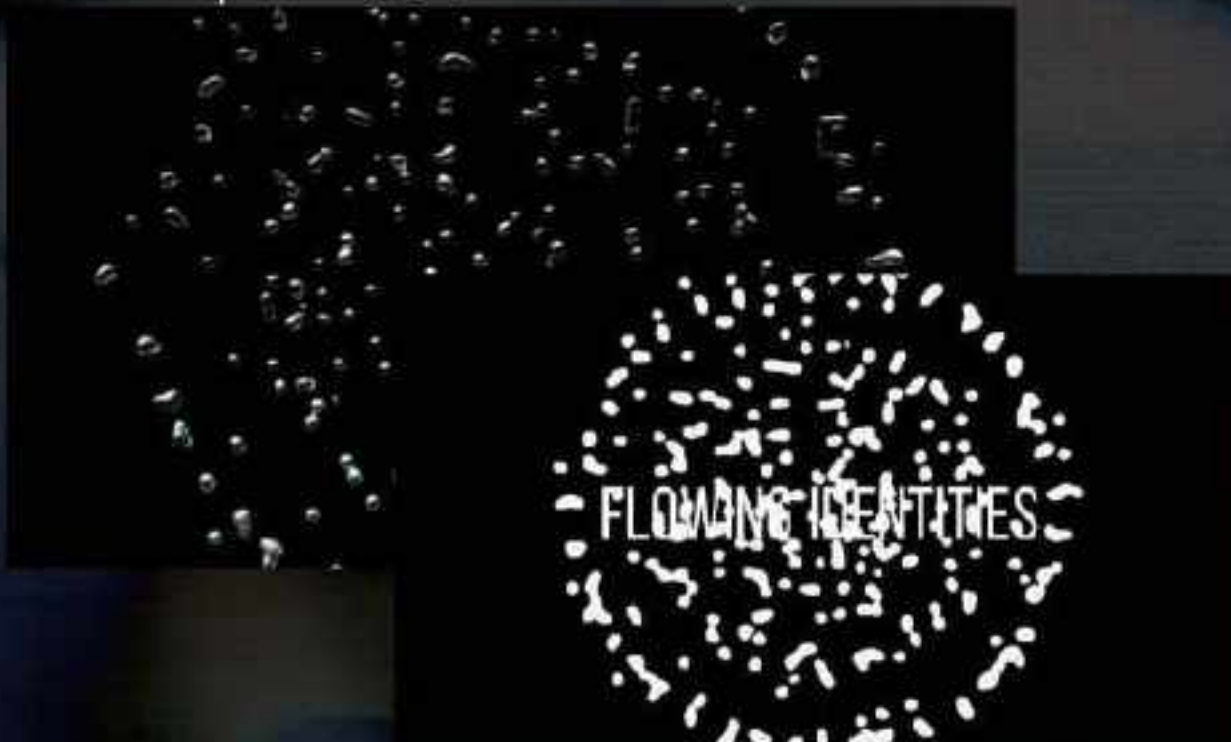
visual experiments in TouchDesigner



editing tests



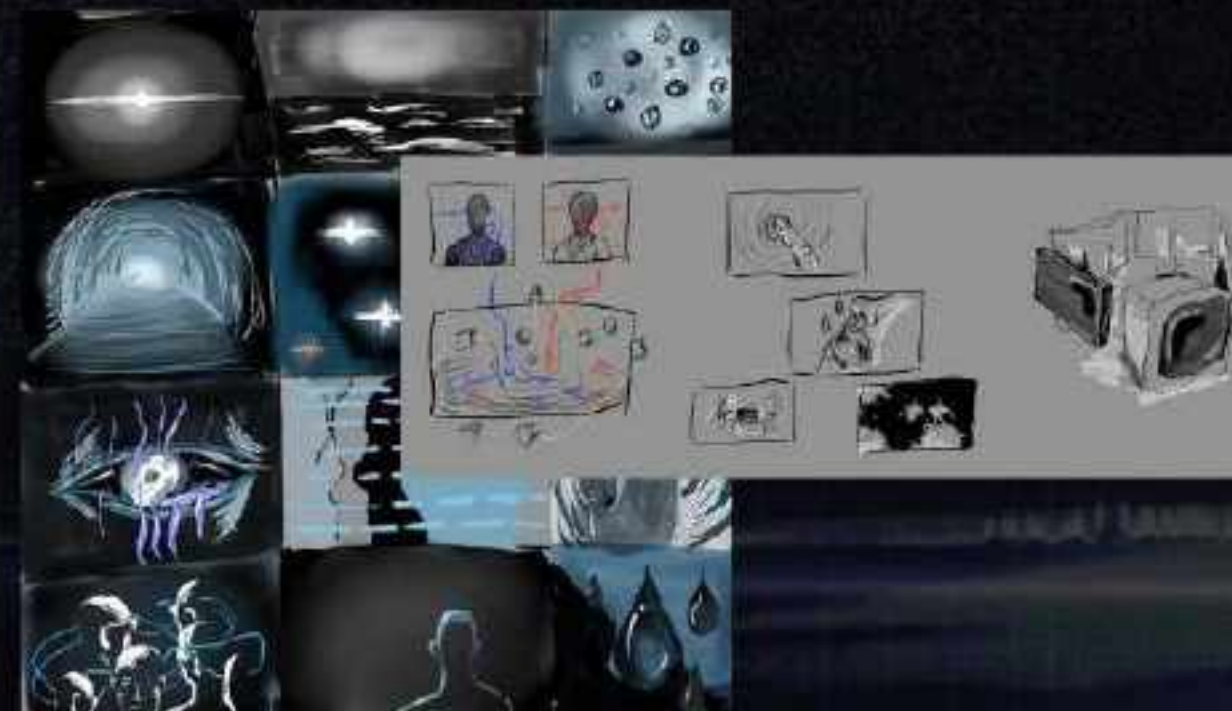
3D and spatial tests in Blender



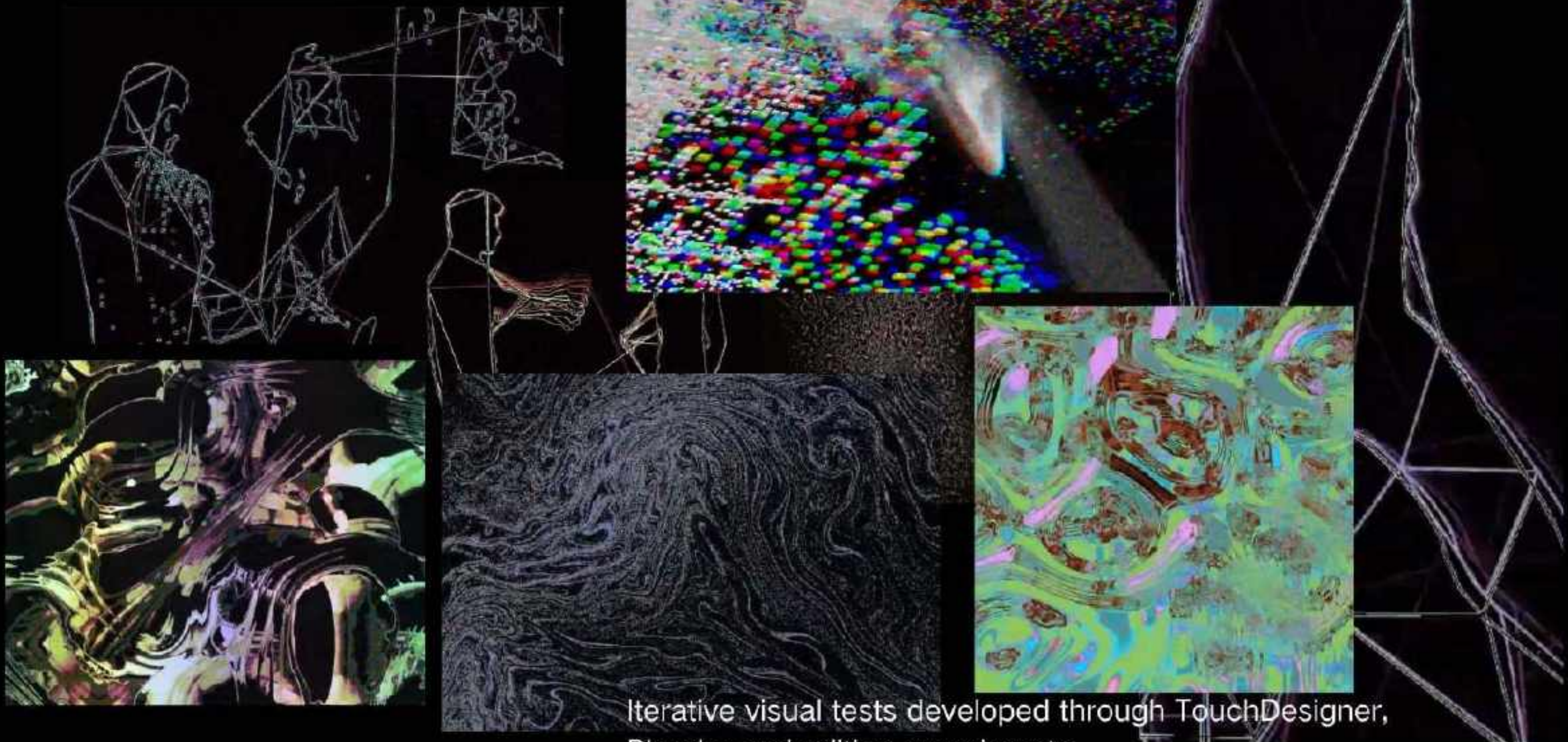
sound tests in Logic Pro



storyboard iteration



Visual Development



Iterative visual tests developed through TouchDesigner, Blender and editing experiments.

Research Process

This project did not begin with a fixed answer, but developed gradually through research, discussion, visual experimentation, and video-making.

The overall process moved through four stages:

01 Concept Development

Starting from body and identity, we built the logic of water → data → residue.

02 Research and Reference Building

We investigated keywords such as flow, trace, digital systems, and the body through references and case studies.

03 Visual Experiments

We translated abstract concepts into visual forms such as water movement, scanning, particles, blur, noise, overlays, and glitches.

04 Video Construction

We integrated the research and visual testing into a time-based moving-image structure, resulting in the final video.

The method of the project is therefore not linear, but iterative—moving back and forth between research, experiment, editing, and refinement.



Final outcome



<https://youtu.be/GkFWxQWQp1Y>

This outcome reframes identity as something shaped by flow, recording, and residue rather than as a fixed condition.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

This project was developed through collaboration across different disciplinary backgrounds. Methods from Design Futures, Intelligent Mobility, Print, and Fashion came together in one project, allowing research, moving image, sound, storytelling, and spatial expression to develop simultaneously.

Each member contributed through their own disciplinary strength while also participating in concept development, enabling the final video to hold both research depth and visual-perceptual coherence.

Xiao Chen — Director / Sound Design / Concept / Editing
Zijing Li — Moving Image / Concept
Ran Huo — Cinematography / Concept / Storytelling
Yiyang Yuan — Visual Composition / Installation / Thinking / Digital Aesthetics



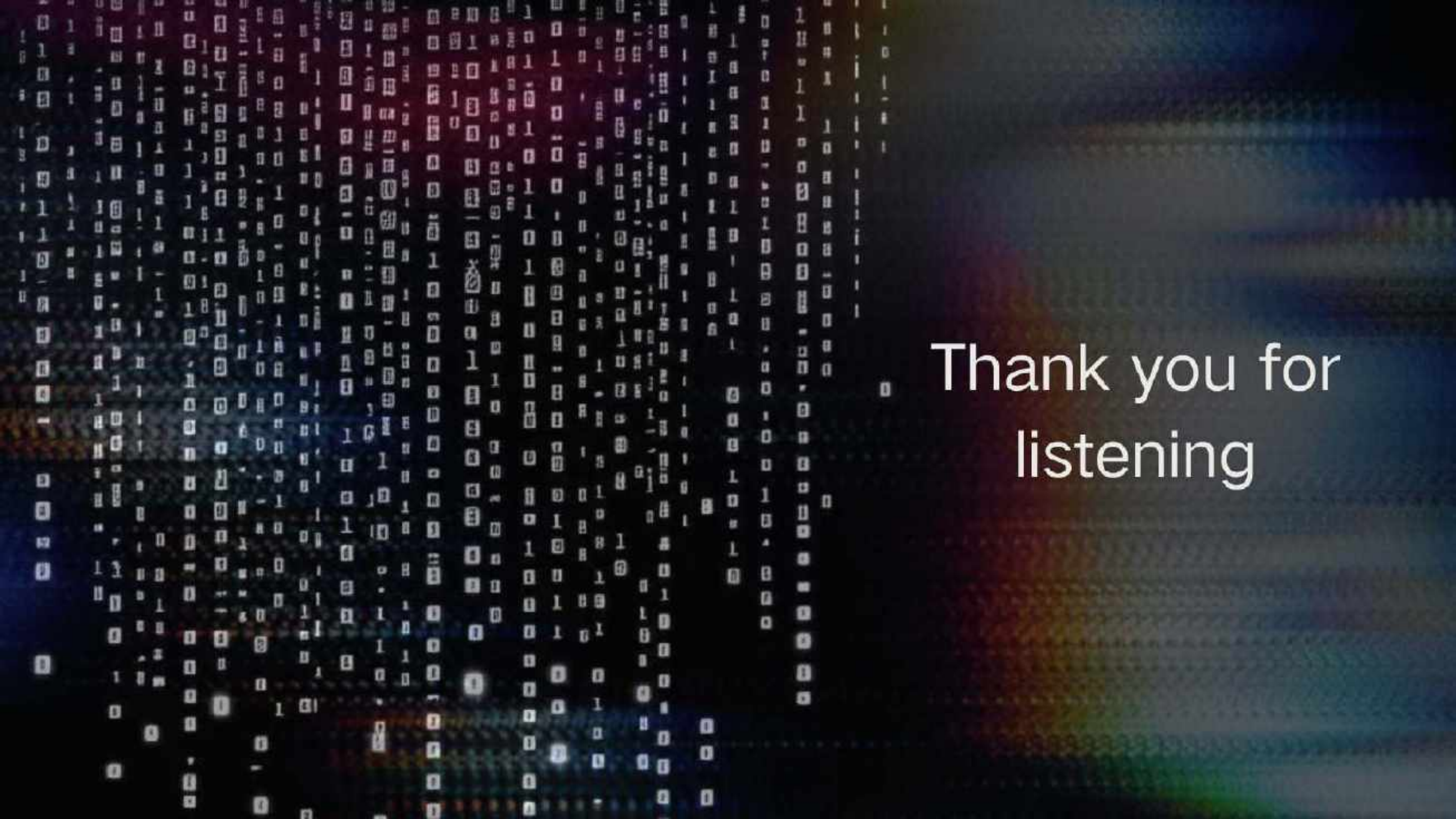
Reference

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Related artworks / artists

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2. Steyerl, H. (2014) Liquidity Inc. Video installation. Museum of Modern Art collection page.
3. Anadol, R. (2019) Machine Hallucination. AI-based audiovisual installation. Refik Anadol Studio.
4. Anadol, R. (2022) Unsupervised — Machine Hallucinations — MoMA. Generative AI installation. Refik Anadol Studio.
5. Semiconductor (Jarman, R. and Gerhardt, J.) (2009) Black Rain. Single-channel video / installation. Semiconductor.
6. Marshmallow Laser Feast (2018) We Live in an Ocean of Air. Large-scale video installation. Marshmallow Laser Feast.
7. Perry, S. (2018) Typhoon coming on. Animation / immersive installation. Serpentine Galleries.



Thank you for
listening