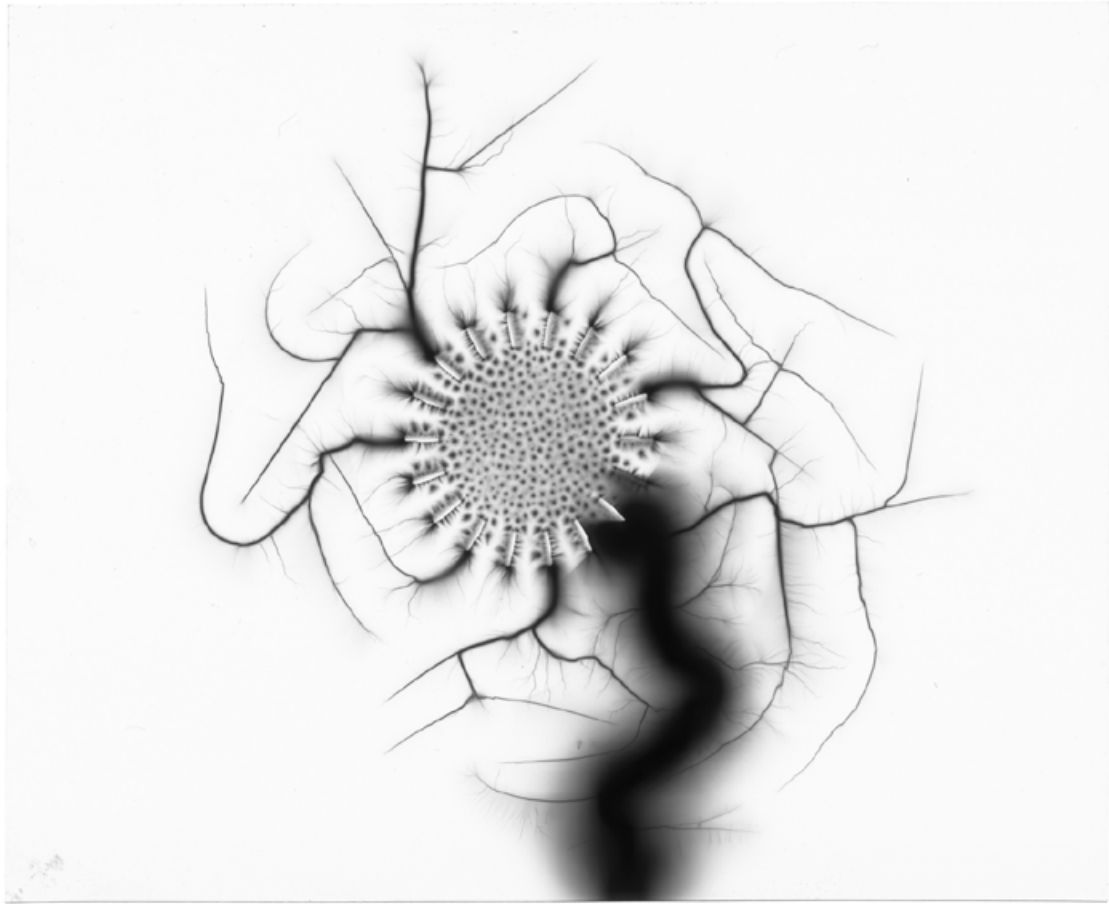


suburban spirits



sean o'connell

suburban spirits



Above, 142 Eric Street Bundeena, showing my grandmother and myself on the verandah of the newly built family home, 1978.

Strange forces move within the walls of suburban homes. The strong personalities of family, their actions, habits, and ways of living, create lingering effects in space, influencing the quality of life within our houses. These mundane forces of human character shape the energetic landscape of our suburban worlds. The generous care of mothers, strict religious observances, deep family conflicts, shining bonds of love, and the assorted minor joys and insanities of everyday life, all leave their traces upon our homes. The fabric of reality is bent through this emotional and spiritual pressure - strange patterns accrue between walls, embed themselves in objects, and resonate down hallways. The family and its relations, the urban architecture of brick and mortar, and the radiated scatter and hum of electrical whitegoods, all create a complex interaction of energetic effects, which warp our vision and shape our lives.

After many years of living in my grandparents' house, I became intensely aware of the ghosts that inhabit our spaces. I moved in with my grandmother after my grandfather died, and cared for her as she grew old, and during this time found myself constantly re-negotiating new ways of living amidst the inherited patterns of the past. In an effort to free myself from family history, I put the house up for sale, and carefully documented the strange forces that inhabit it.

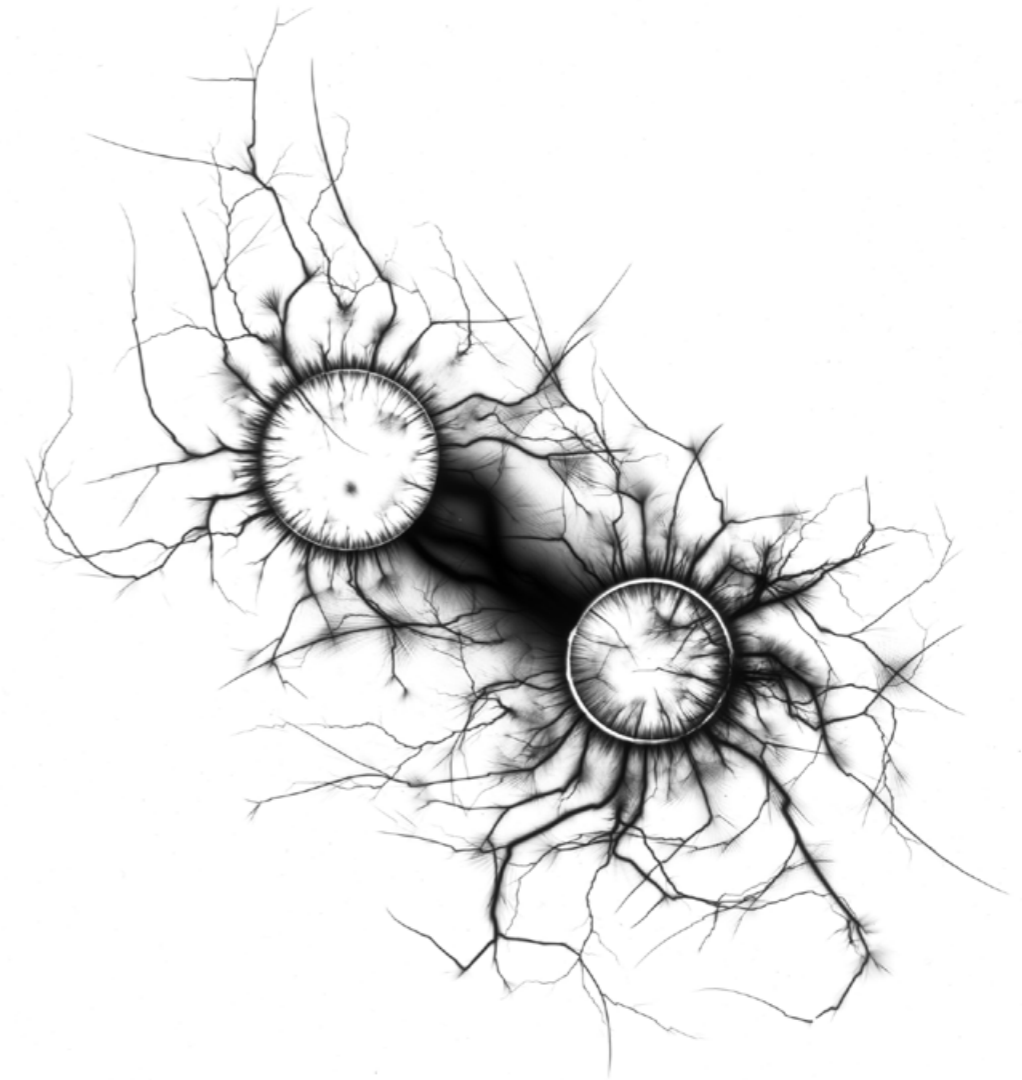
These images echo with my grandmother's strong demanding voice, my grandfather's keen silent sight, the care of my mother, the laughter of good friends, the touch of lost lovers, and the trees and flowers of a typical suburban garden. Some images track electrical discharges as

they course through personal objects, others peer into the sub-atomic spaces between wood and plaster walls, some are awash with the soft light transmitted through flower petals, or the tracings of a laser line bent by the sound of a recorded voice now long gone. There are also snapshots from the past, of when this house was new, of the people that inhabited it, and of objects of importance. These collected images explore the past and its magnetic pull, drawing us backwards, ever while the future beckons us further on.

While the personal nature of such work is obvious, there is also a broader focus. This broader focus attempts to subvert the dominant perception of surfaces and outer edges, with an alternate perception of reality that tracks the flow of energy through form and matter. The types of energy that are tracked here are electrical, magnetic, acoustic, lightwave, and x-ray radiation. In exploring the world through the transmission of energy, rather than the reflection of light upon surfaces, edges begin to disappear, and boundaries become less easily defined. The focus shifts away from single objects, or individuals, towards the movement of energy that passes through and between things. Standard borders and distinctions are revealed as simple constructs of thought - as artefacts of knowledge that arise from attempting to grasp the overwhelming complexity of everyday reality. It is my hope that through the reconsideration of fundamental epistemological structures, such as this habit of creating edges in perception and knowledge, that deep shifts in understanding are possible. Through such shifts, we grow not only in understanding, but also in nature and spirit.



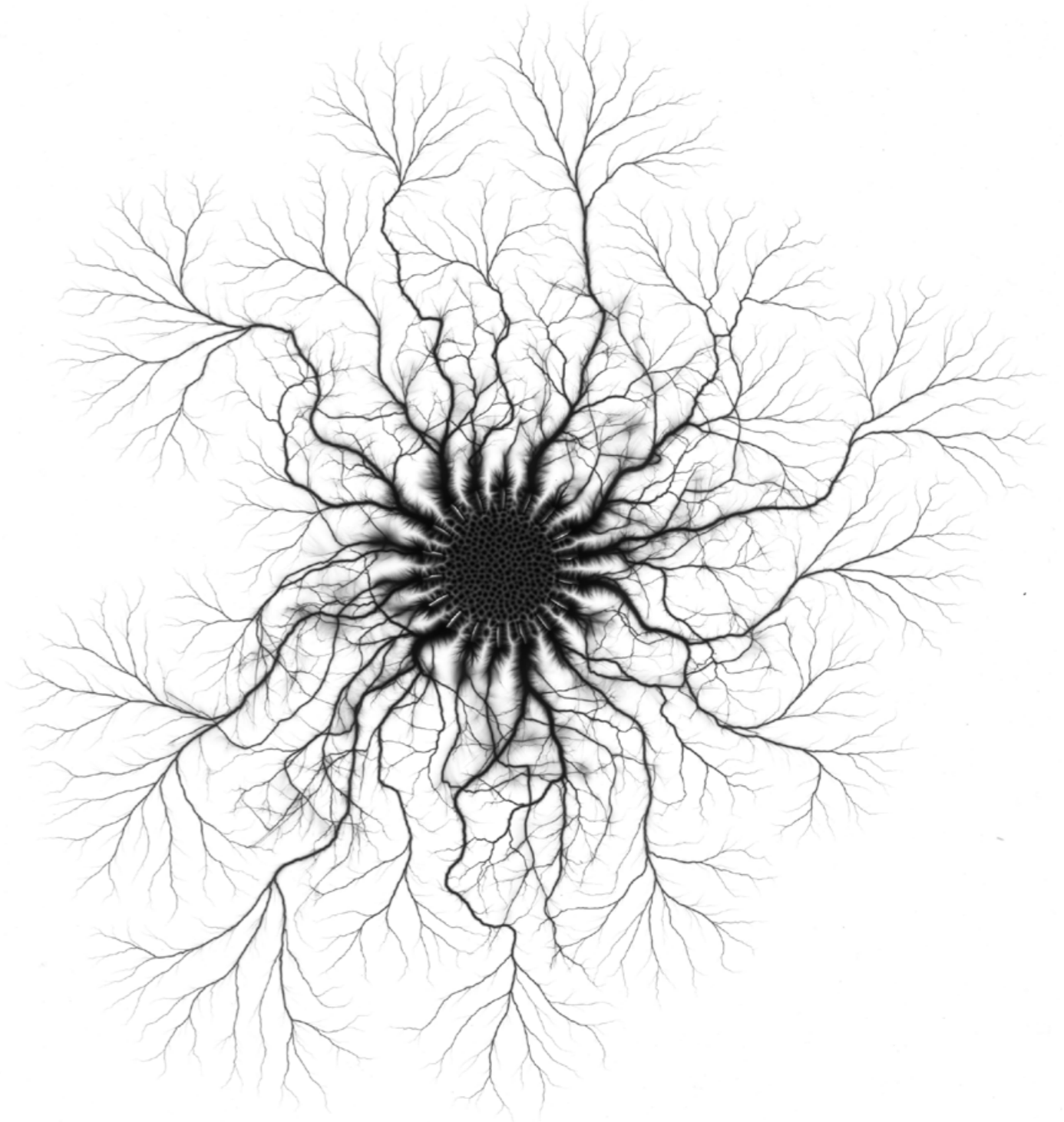
Above, the closed door of my grandparents' bedroom, imaged by x-ray photography using Industrex MX125 radiographic film.



Above, photographs of my grandparents, 1935-1940.  
Opposite, their wedding rings, imaged together through 30kV DC spark discharge over Rollei ATO 2.1 orthographic film.

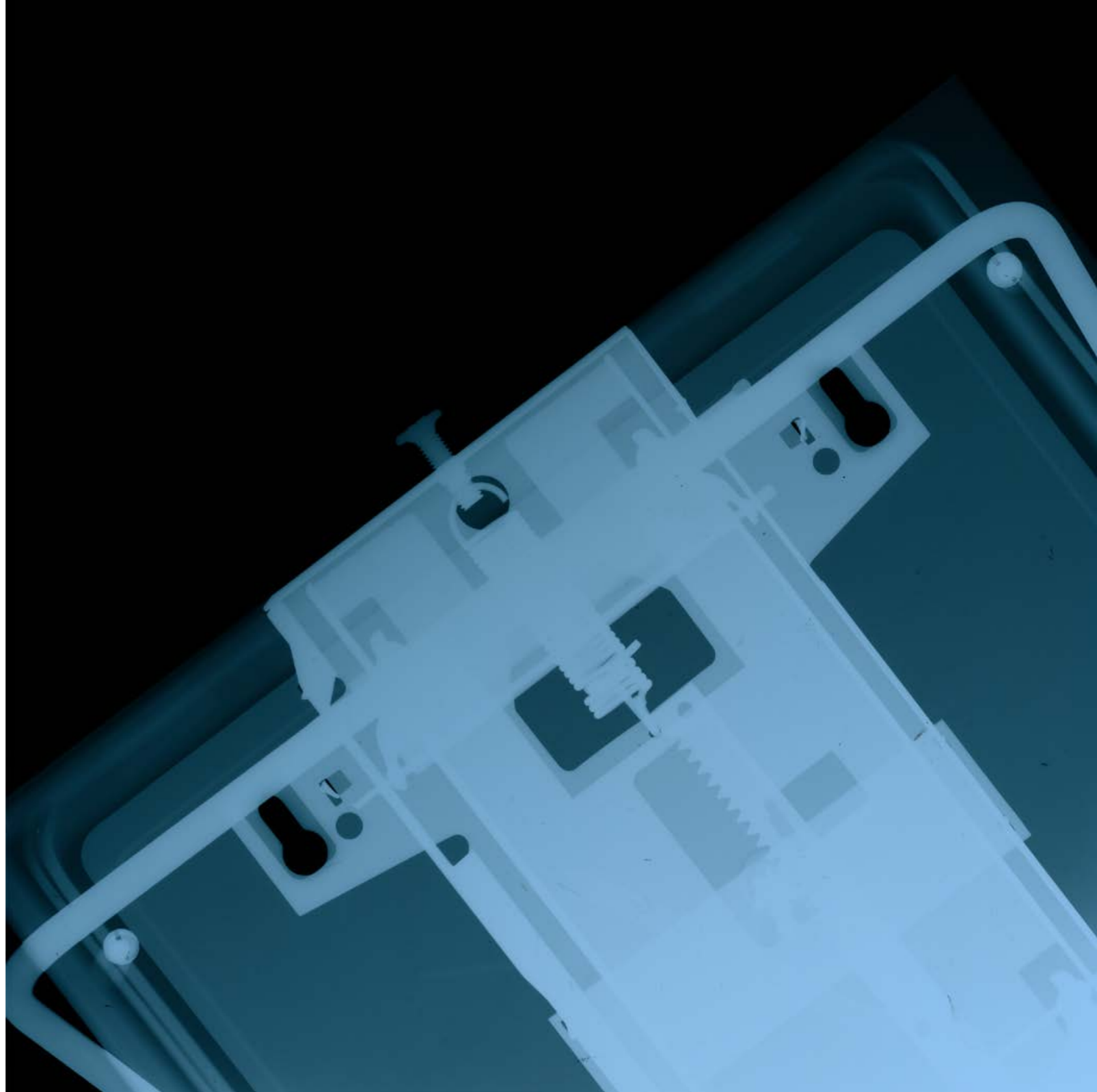


Above, a milling tool made by my grandfather during his tool-making apprenticeship in Germany.  
Opposite, the cutting head of the tool imaged by 60kV DC spark discharge over Arista orthographic film.





Above, my grandmother's kitchen scales, used daily, and repaired constantly with glue and sticky tape.  
Opposite, the mechanism of the kitchen scales imaged through x-ray photography using Industrex T200 radiographic film.



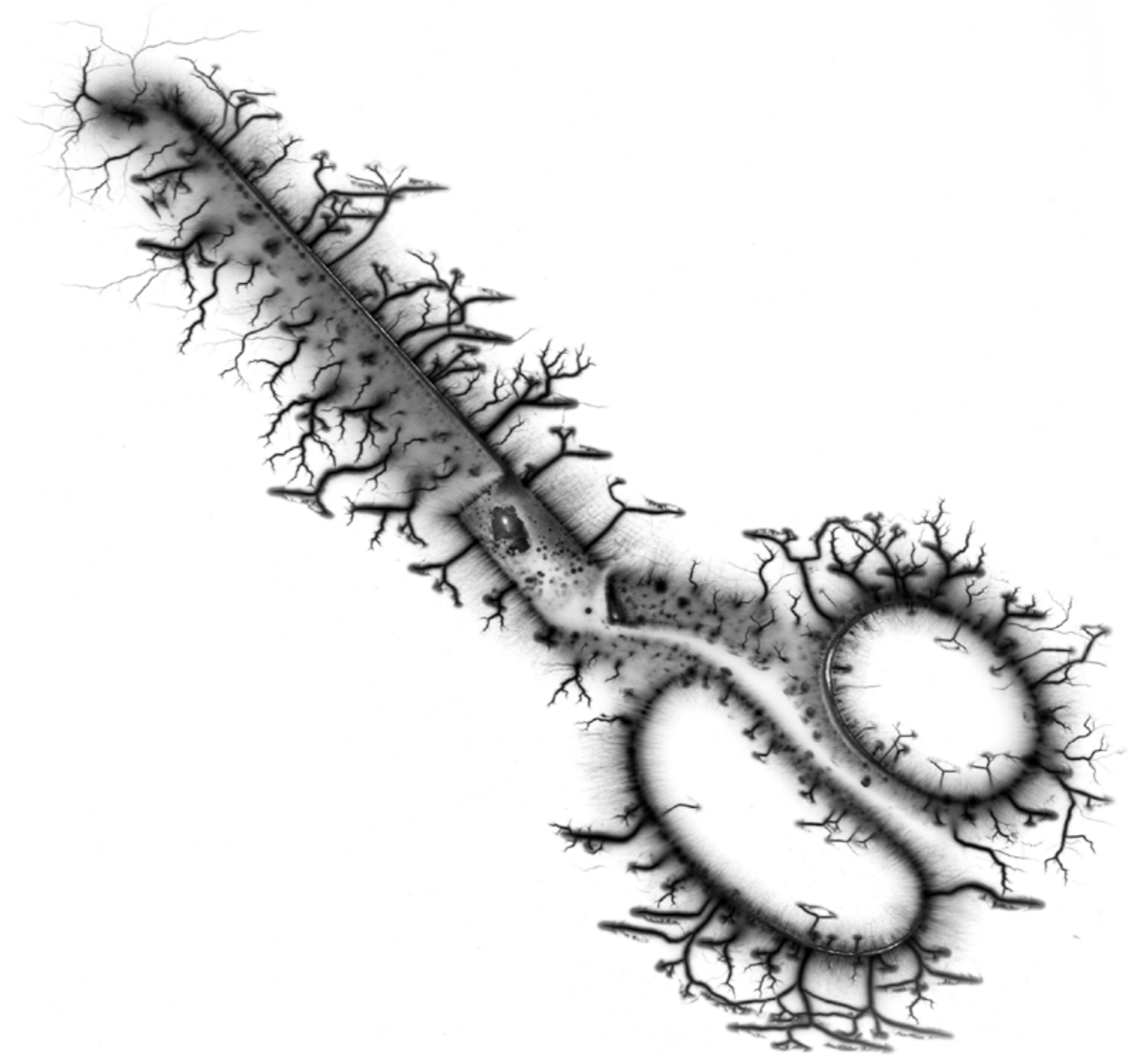
Opposite, a ball of the wool handspun by my mother, used by my grandmother to knit a jumper 25 years ago, one ball of which has been kept for yearly darning and repairs, imaged through 45kV AC 800Hz spark discharge across Rollei Ortho 25 orthographic film.







Above, my grandmother and myself, dressed to please, 1979.  
Opposite, my grandmother's kitchen scissors, always at the ready to cut, imaged through 35kV DC spark discharge over Ilford Ortho Plus orthographic film.

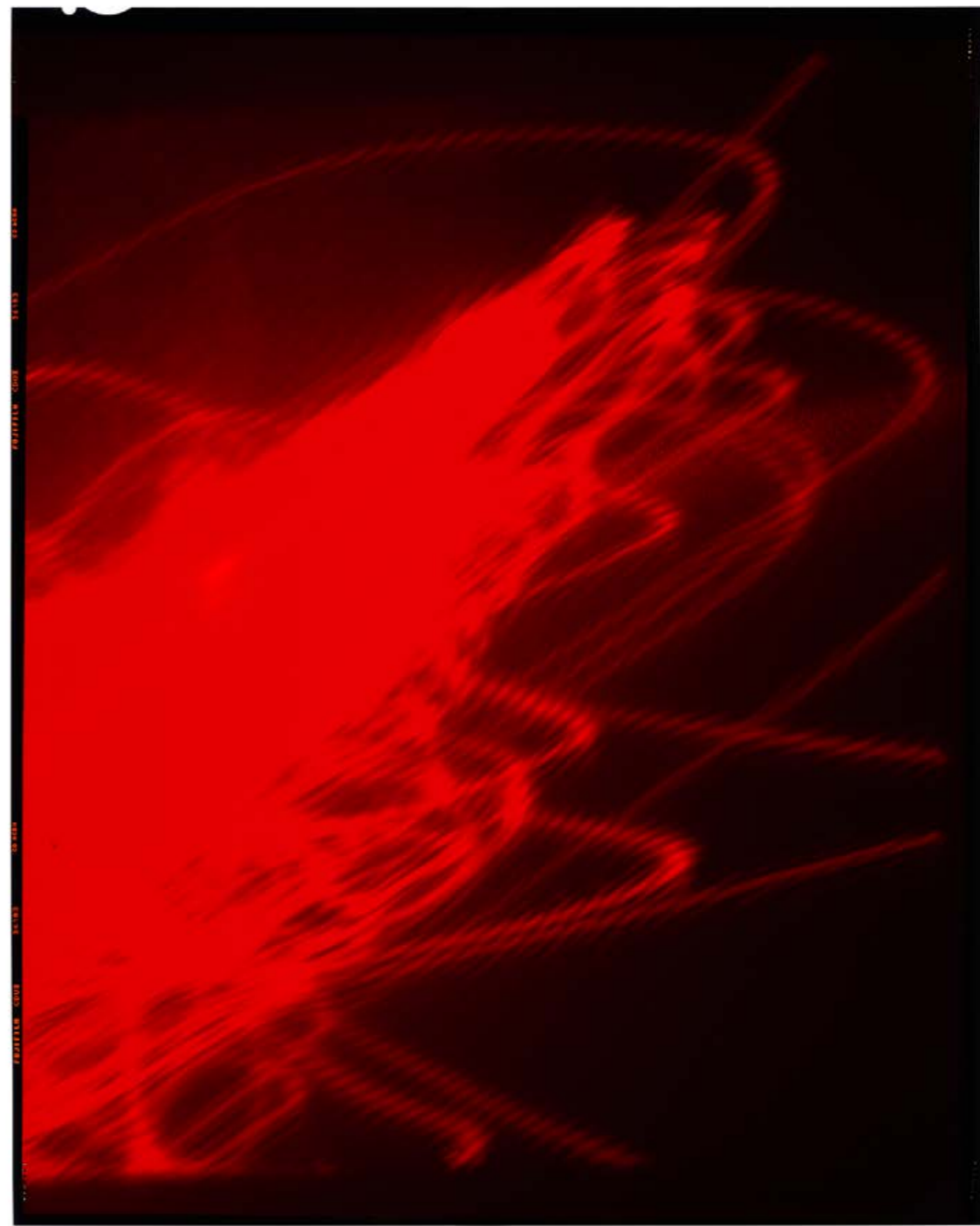




Opposite, a recording of my grandmother singing "happy birthday", imaged by 532nm green laser light bent across two small mirrors vibrating on a pair of audio oscillators, then reflected in the bathroom mirror she combed her hair in every morning, and finally exposed directly onto Fuji CDU colour slide film.

Overleaf, left, a recording of my grandmother telling an old fairy tale about cuckoos, just before her death, imaged by 532nm green laser light onto Arista orthographic film.

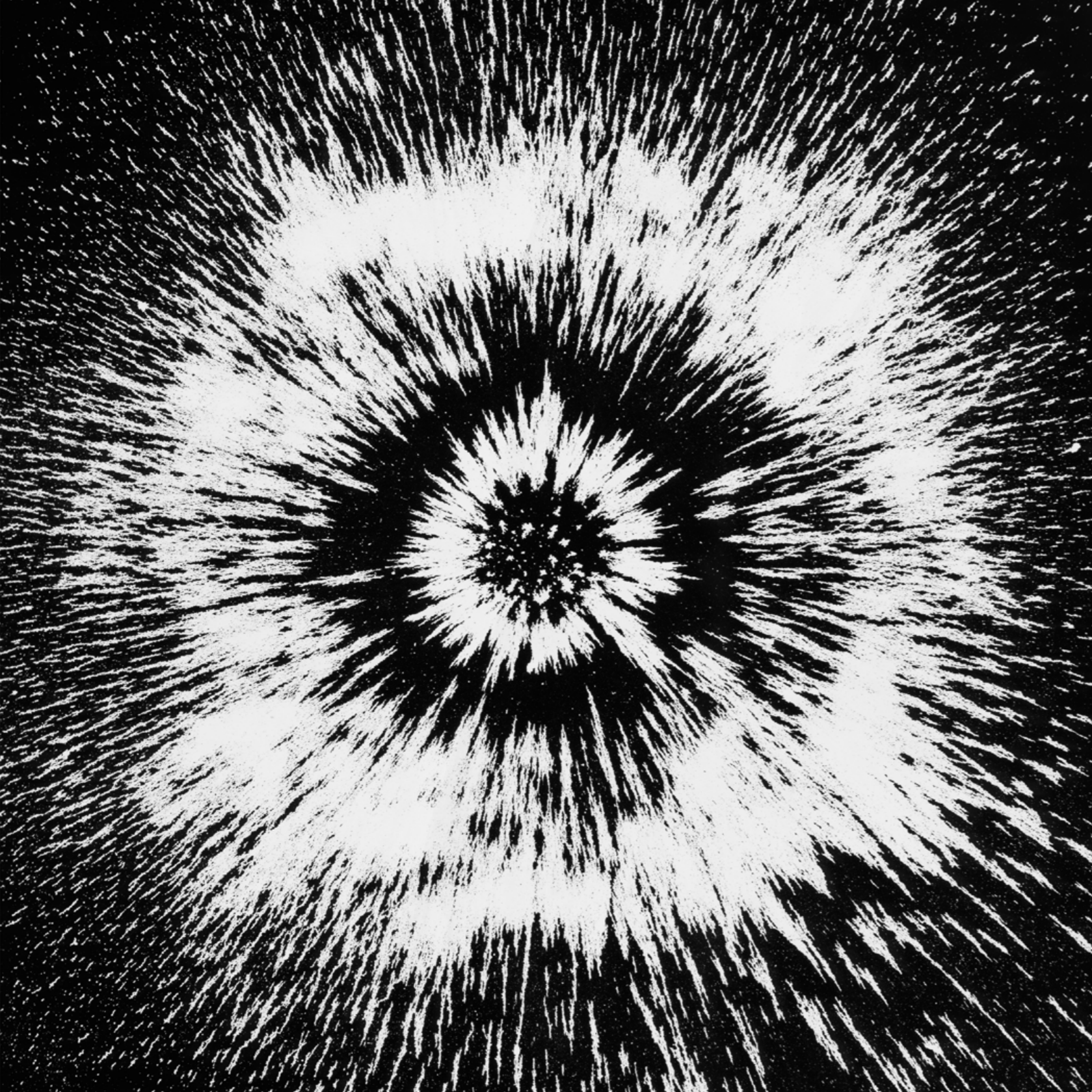
Overleaf, right, a recording of my grandmother explaining the traditional German recipe of kartoffelpuffer, imaged by 650nm red laser light onto Fuji CDU colour slide film.



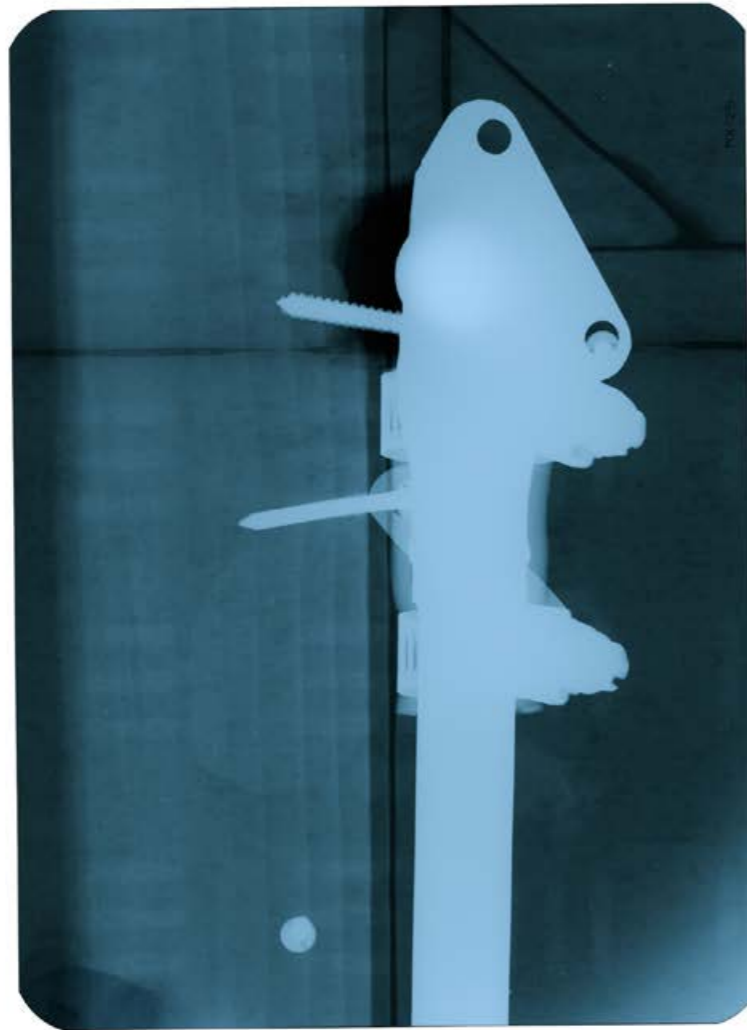


Above, my grandfather's headband loupe that he wore constantly when engraving, peering into the minutiae of his work. Opposite, the loupe imaged by x-ray photography, using Industrex T200 radiographic film.





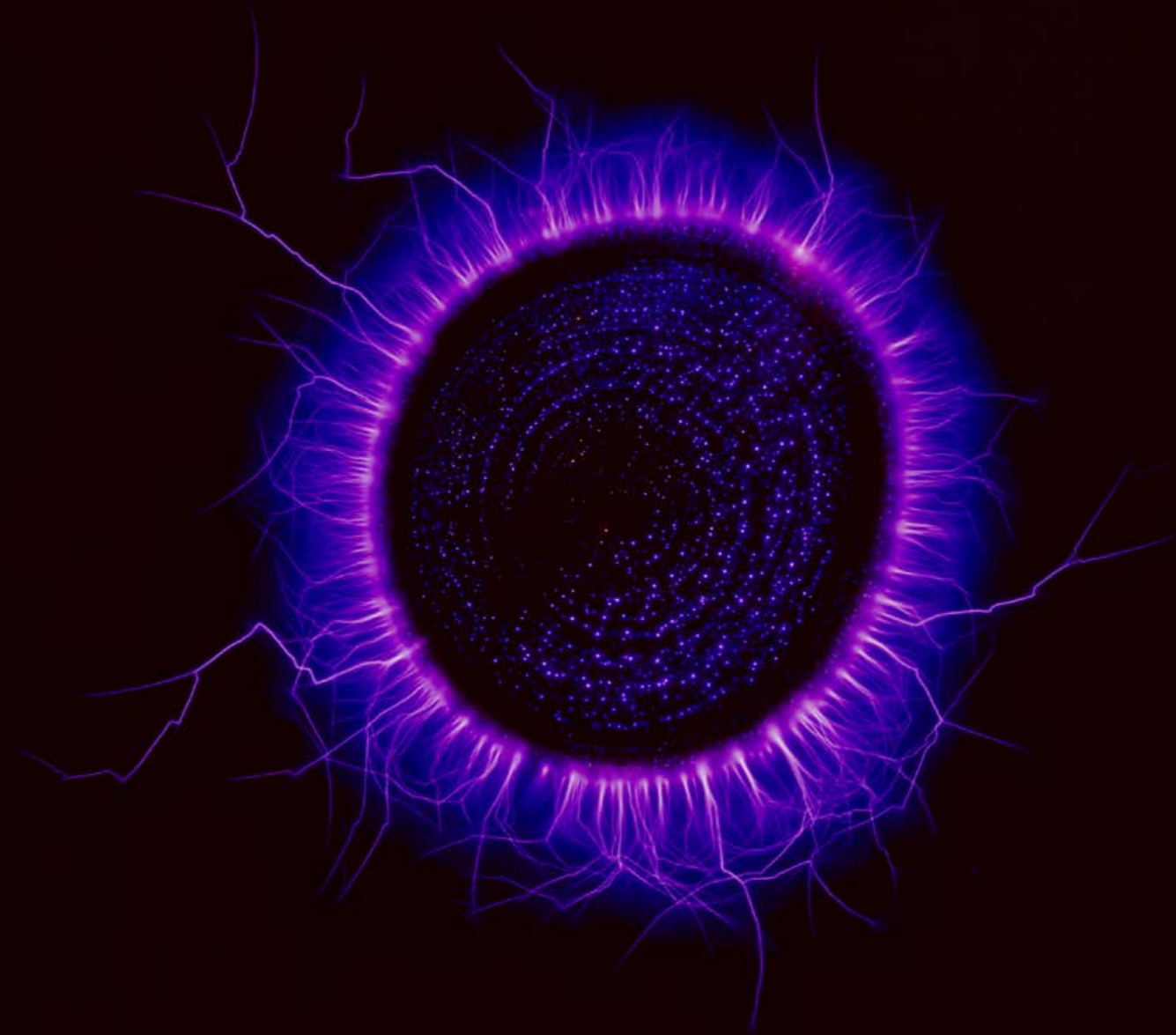
Opposite, the front face of my grandfather's hammer, passed down to him from his father, imaged through magnetically arranged iron filings as a photogram over Arista orthographic film.



Opposite, a 25 year old dodgy plumbing repair buried deep within the hallway walls, made by my grandfather while I helped, using washing machine hose and ring clamps (visible as the blurry section around the pipe in the middle of the image), then sealed up, and here located and imaged by x-ray photography onto Industrex T200 radiographic film.

Overleaf, two dents in the wallpapered plaster of the stairway, the small one at left made by my grandmother's elbow when she fell down the stairs while hypoglycaemic, and the larger one at right made by my own elbow as I fell down the stairs a decade later, during a dinner with my partner and another beautiful woman.



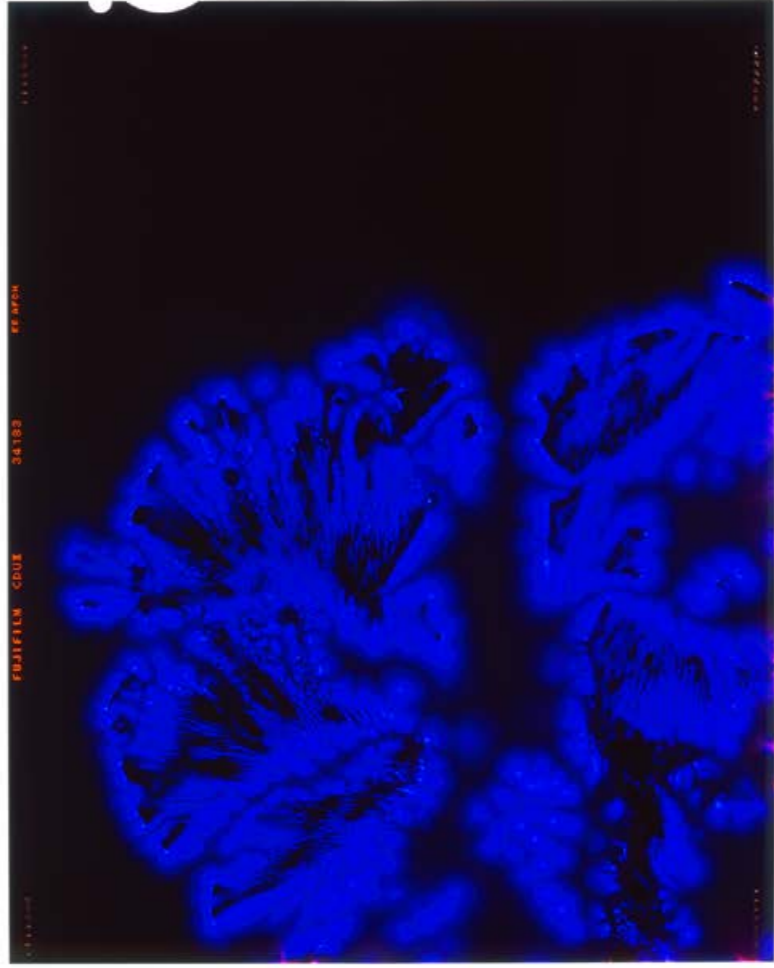


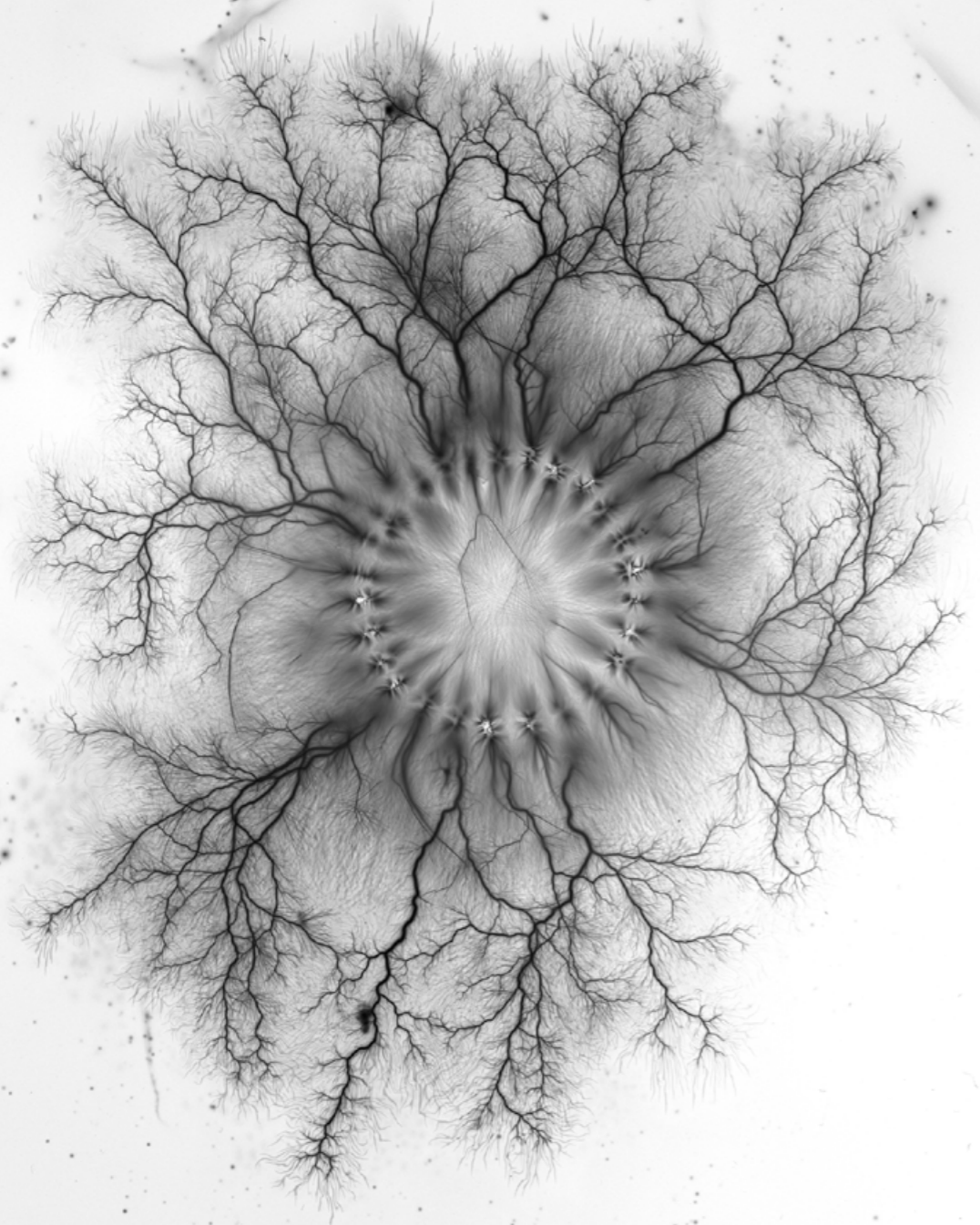
Opposite, a cleanly cut limb from my grandmother's favourite tree in the garden, a huge frangipani, imaged through 20kV AC 1.2kHz spark discharge over Fuji Velvia colour slide film.

Overleaf, left, a hibiscus flower from the backyard, imaged through 30kV AC 800Hz spark discharge over Fuji CDU colour slide film.

Overleaf, right, the same hibiscus flower, illuminated from behind using my grandmother's bedside battery torch that she used every night to go to the toilet, imaged directly onto Fuji CDU colour slide film.







Opposite, a bronze "thought-form" object, made for helping to resolve complex problems (such as typical family craziness), imaged through a combination of 40kV DC and 25kV AC 300Hz spark discharges, across Foma 100 negative film.

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2017