

Jaamal Benjamin 2024

# Black Gooey Universe

## American Artist

Mother of All Demos II, 2021



# American Artist

- Contemporary artist working in new media, video, installation and writing.
- Born in Altadena, CA, 1989
- Legally changed name in 2013



Photo: Myles Loftin

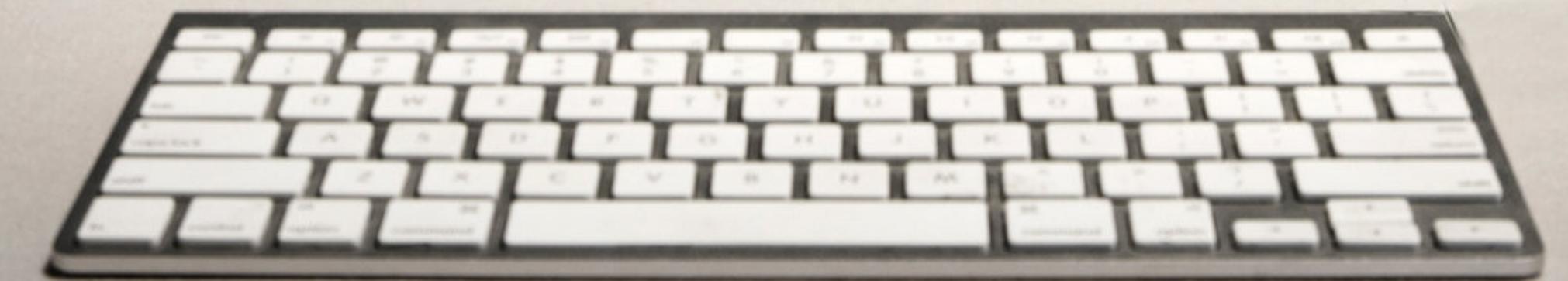


American Artist (photo by Gioncarlo Valentine)

Are you alive?

I'm just a memory.

The officer that killed Philando Castile was acquitted





I'm Blue (If I Was █ I Would Die) (installation view, Koenig & Clinton, Brooklyn), 2019

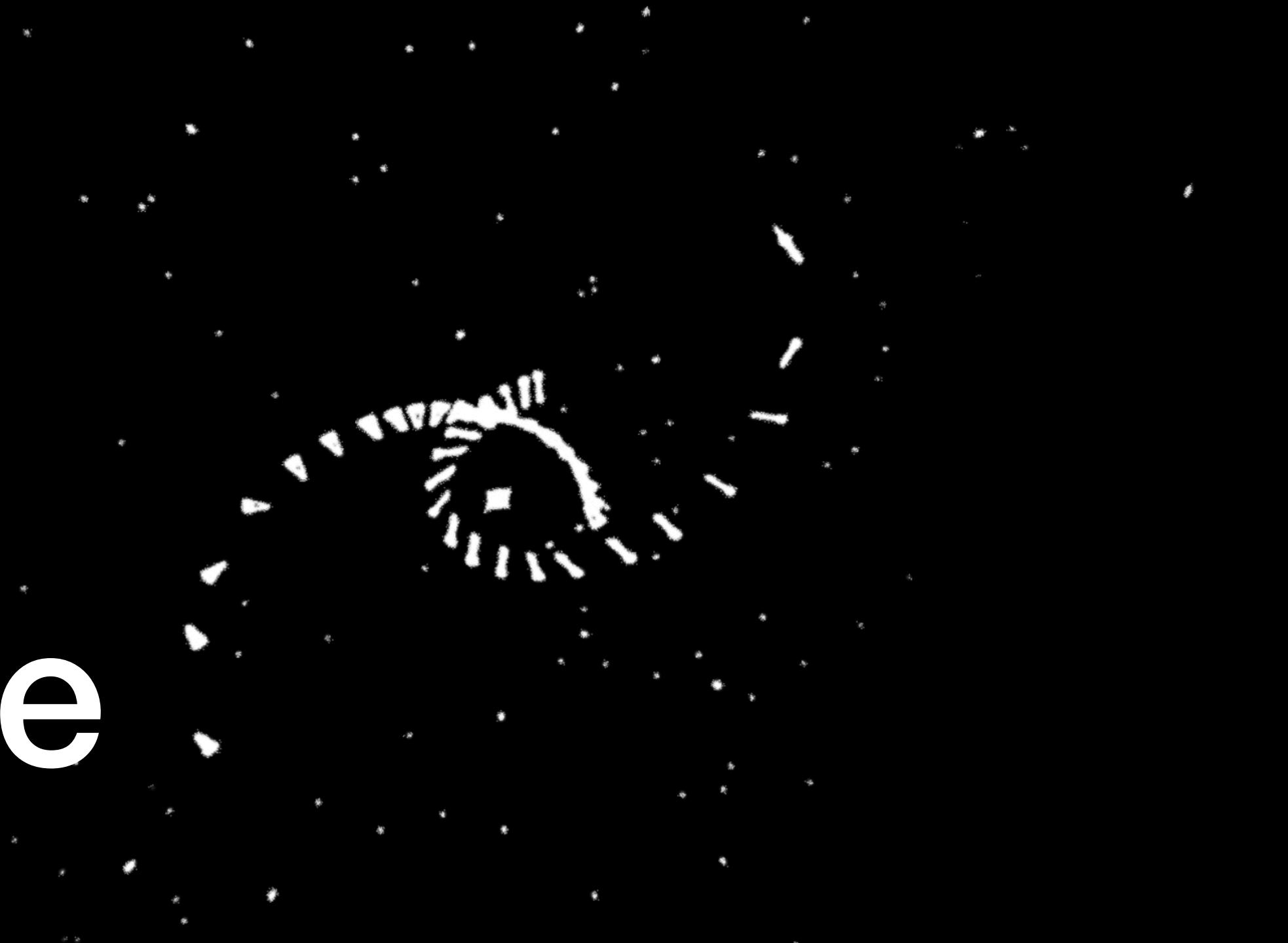




View of American Artist's "Shaper of God" at REDCAT, Los Angeles, 2022. Image courtesy of the artist; Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles; and REDCAT, Los Angeles. Photo by Brica Wilcox.

# Black Gooey Universe

## American Artist - Winter 2018

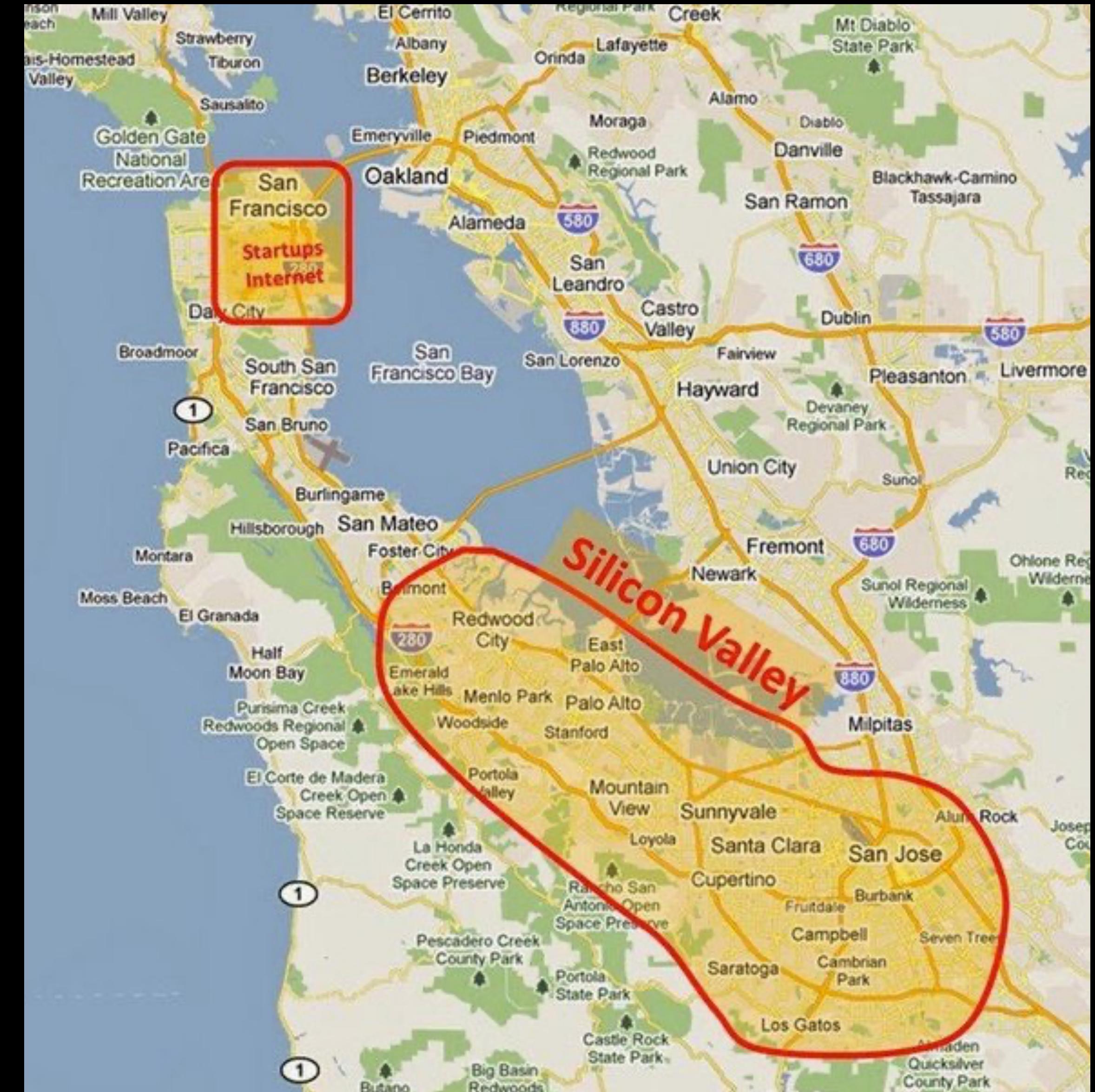


A timelapse screencapture of the game *Spacewar!* (1969) being played on the PDP-1 monitor.

# Black Gooey Universe

## Incubating Whiteness

- Silicon Valley, south of Bay Area California
- SV is an incubator for the research and production of high technology.
- Research labs for contemporary digital life are based in SV since the 1940s
- Funding from the federal gov. national defense sector after WWII



# Black Gooey Universe

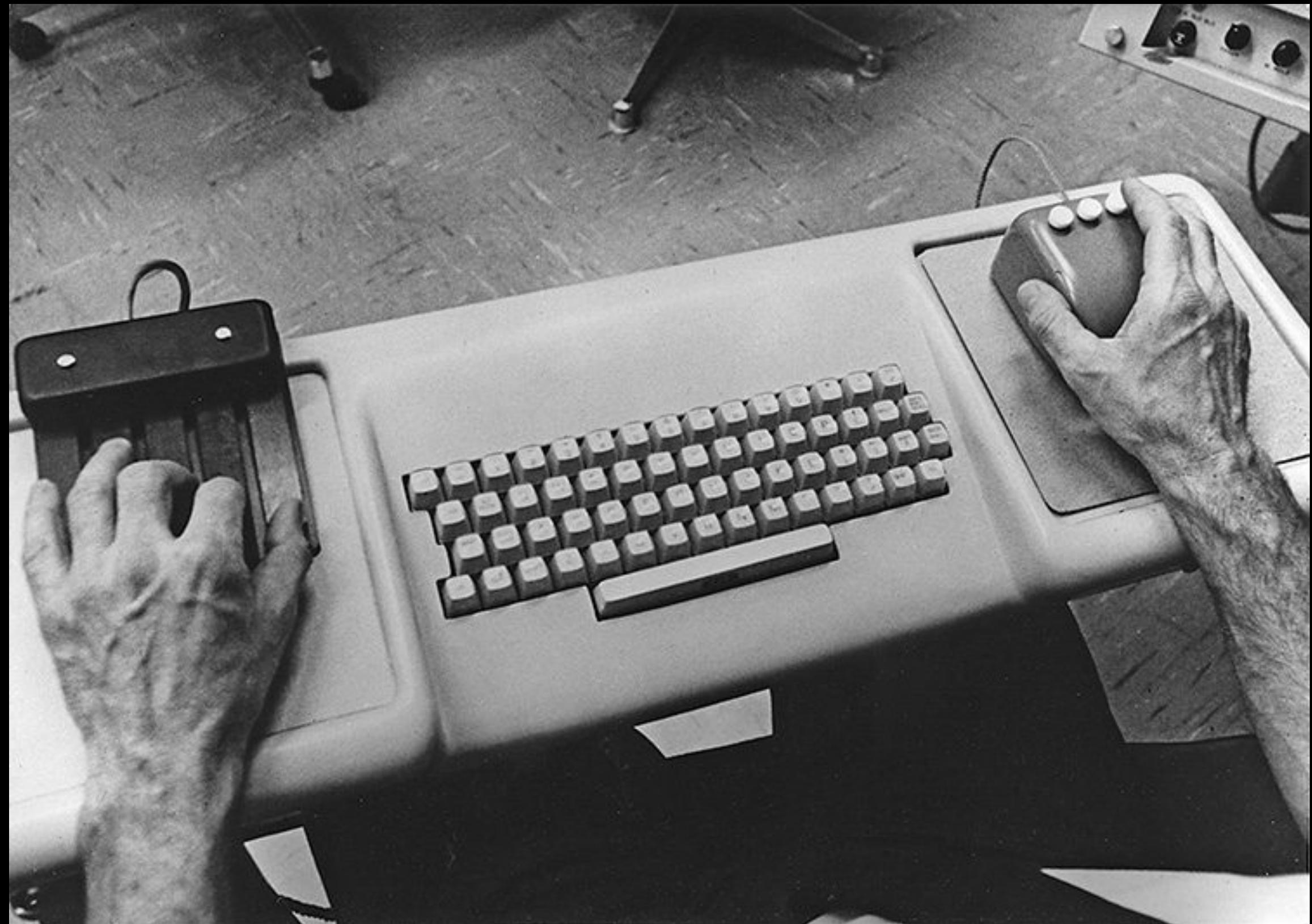
## Incubating Whiteness

- Stanford Research Institute (SRI, 1946) created Silicon Valley “creativity”- space for cis white men to engineer tech development free of economic pressures
- Model influenced XeroxPARC, Apple, Ideo, Google, and Facebook



# Black Gooey Universe Incubating Whiteness

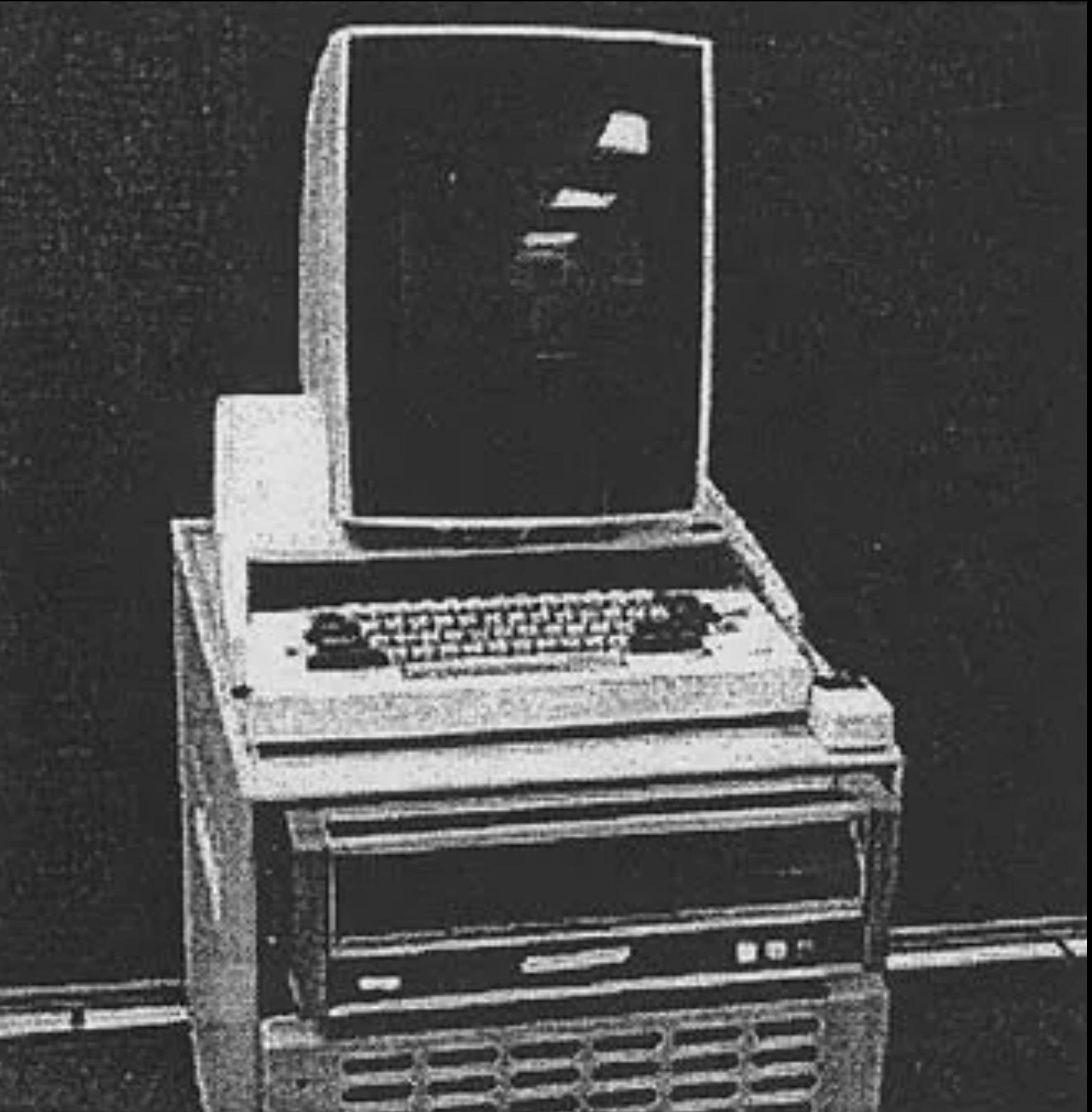
- In 1968, the first iteration of a GUI—a clickable interface, cursor and remedial mouse—were demoed at SRI's Augmented Intellect Research Center.
- Considered the “Mother of all demos”, a big moment for high-tech innovation



# Black Gooey Universe

## Incubating Whiteness

- In 1970, XeroxPARC absorbed SRI employees when national defense funding got tight.
- Xerox poured money into PARC community and eventually developed Xerox Alto, a \$10K minicomputer with a working GUI.
- In 1979, Apple's CEO offers shares to Xerox in a trade for their GUI, mouse and ethernet



Xerox Alto

# Black Gooey Universe

## Incubating Whiteness

- Apple popularized the devices into the Apple Lisa, the first commercial computer to include a GUI.
- Apple Lisa offered buyers “point and click” capabilities on “folders” and “windows” in a white space.
- Prior to Xerox Alto and Apple Lisa, computer monitor screens appeared black with code lines in green or white characters



Apple Lisa

# Black Gooey Universe

## Incubating Whiteness

- “Users of technology are now a general populace rather than just colleagues and fellow white male nerds, but the industry is still white.”
- Startup culture started in the 40s/50s. Since then, developers have increasingly lost touch with the interest of users, reinforcing systems which “elude non-white critique”



# Black Gooey Universe

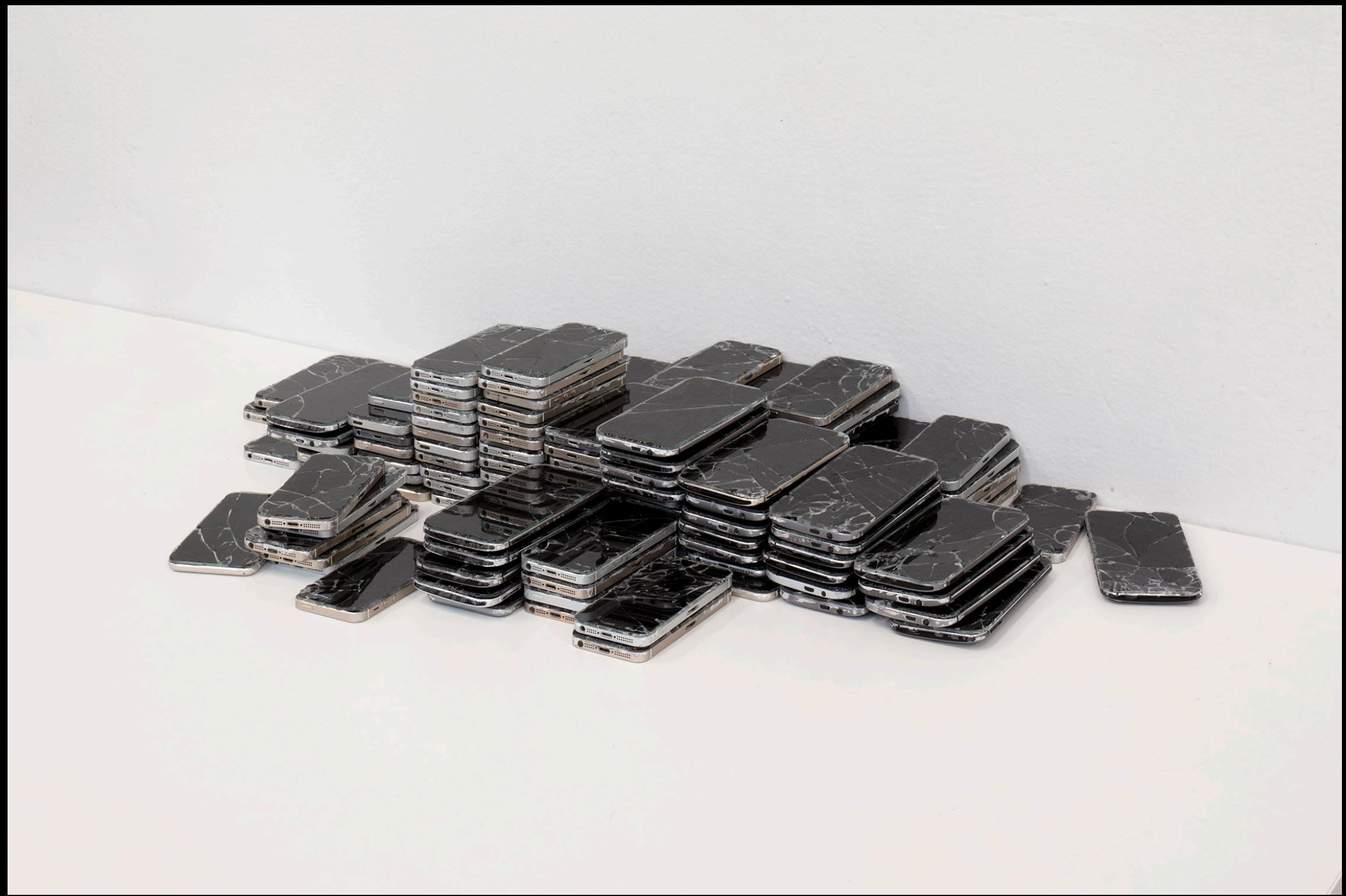
## Incubating Whiteness

- Artist writes Racial Slavery provided material and ideological basis for the US. ...Silicon Valley then advances anti-blackness through hi-tech products and processes.
- Artist continues “*Whiteness in the space of high technology requires: market driven products that are anti-black, an echo chamber of white ideals (i.e. an ivory tower), and the creation of public-facing devices and platforms where white space is posited as neutral.*”

# Black Gooey Universe

## Incubating Whiteness

- They also write “*Given this context, it can be said that whiteness is the core of the labs that exist in Silicon Valley, and inscribes all of the products borne out of it in a multitude of ways.*

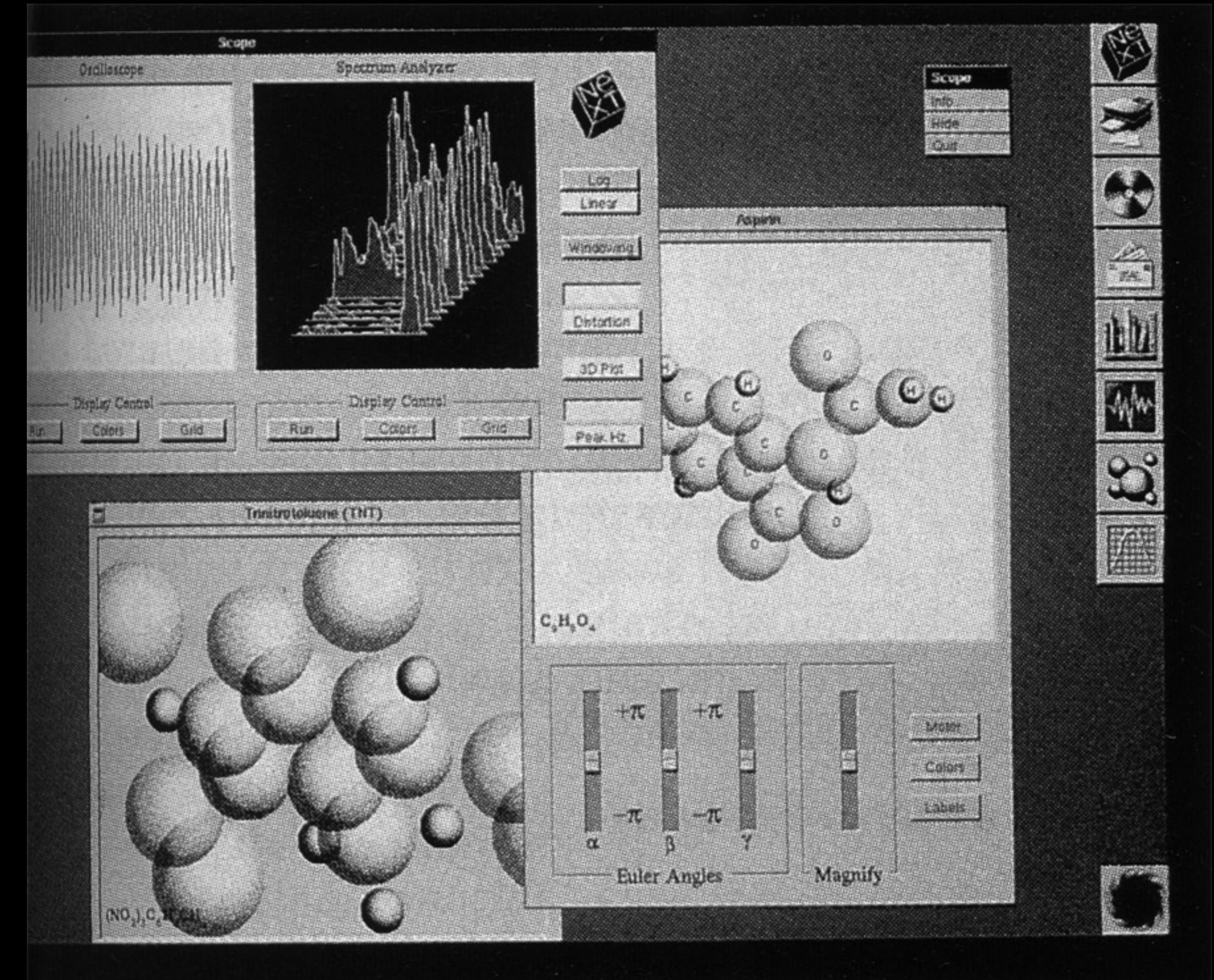


No State, 2021  
Aluminum phone housings, silicone, glass

# Black Gooey Universe

## The Gooey Universe

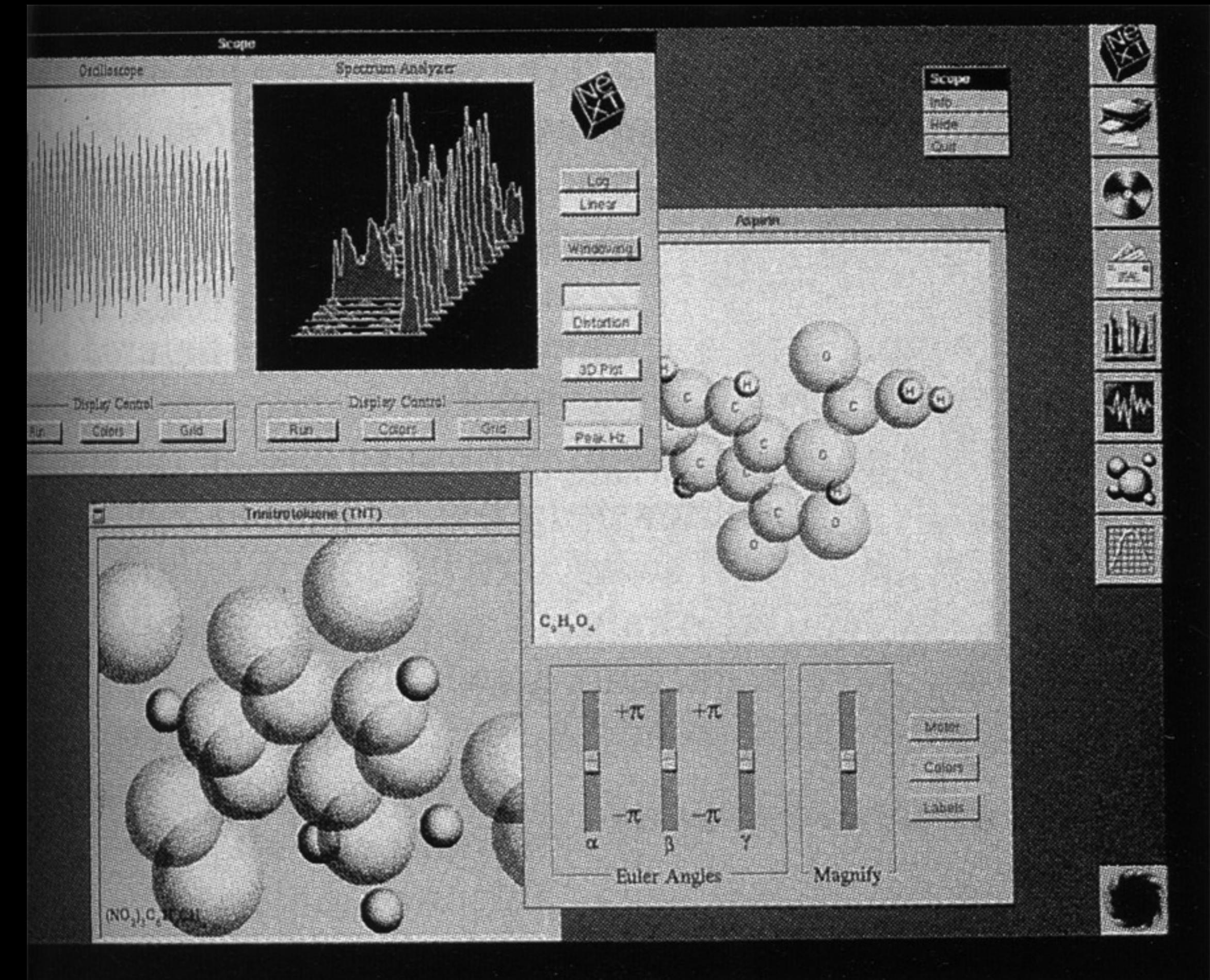
- Early computers required programmers to work in an analog way. Varied methods provided different benefits. Simplifying the process to one method and further abstracting it through clickable icons and images create limitations once available in early devices.



# Black Gooey Universe

## The Gooey Universe

- Designed as a solve for the tedious and tenuous personal computer, the GUI, phonetically “gooey,” was a consolidation of *all* interfacing methods into a single screen, keyboard, and mouse.



# Black Gooey Universe

## The Gooey Universe

- These limitations and autonomous processes compel users to process the white neutrality of the screen and anti-blackness of technology uncritically because it is so easy and efficient to use.

# Black Gooey Universe

## The Gooey Universe

- In “On Software, or the Persistence of Visual Knowledge,” Chun argues that the ultimate illusion of the interface is its association with transparency.
- Contrary to this association, the screen never represents something existent elsewhere but renders for the first time all things seen, whether a reference exists prior to its representation on screen is arbitrary. For Chun, software is analogous to ideology and its critique, mapping a logic of immaterial beliefs represented in superimposition to a material hardware which always exists but is somehow beyond vision.

# SoftBlackware

“Blackness has, so to say, formed the ground for white, with black gooey being antithetical to the values of the white screen. Black gooey might then be a platform of slowness (“dragged time”, “colored time”<sup>4</sup>), refusal, thought, complexity, critique, softness, loudness, transparency, uselessness, and brokenness. A planar body that longs for the solitude and vastness of the command-line, yet nuanced and sharp, to usurp and destroy a contemporary hegemonic interface.”



American Artist  
Mother of All Demos III  
2022