

Drawing Sound ~ Oramics and Feminist Epistemology



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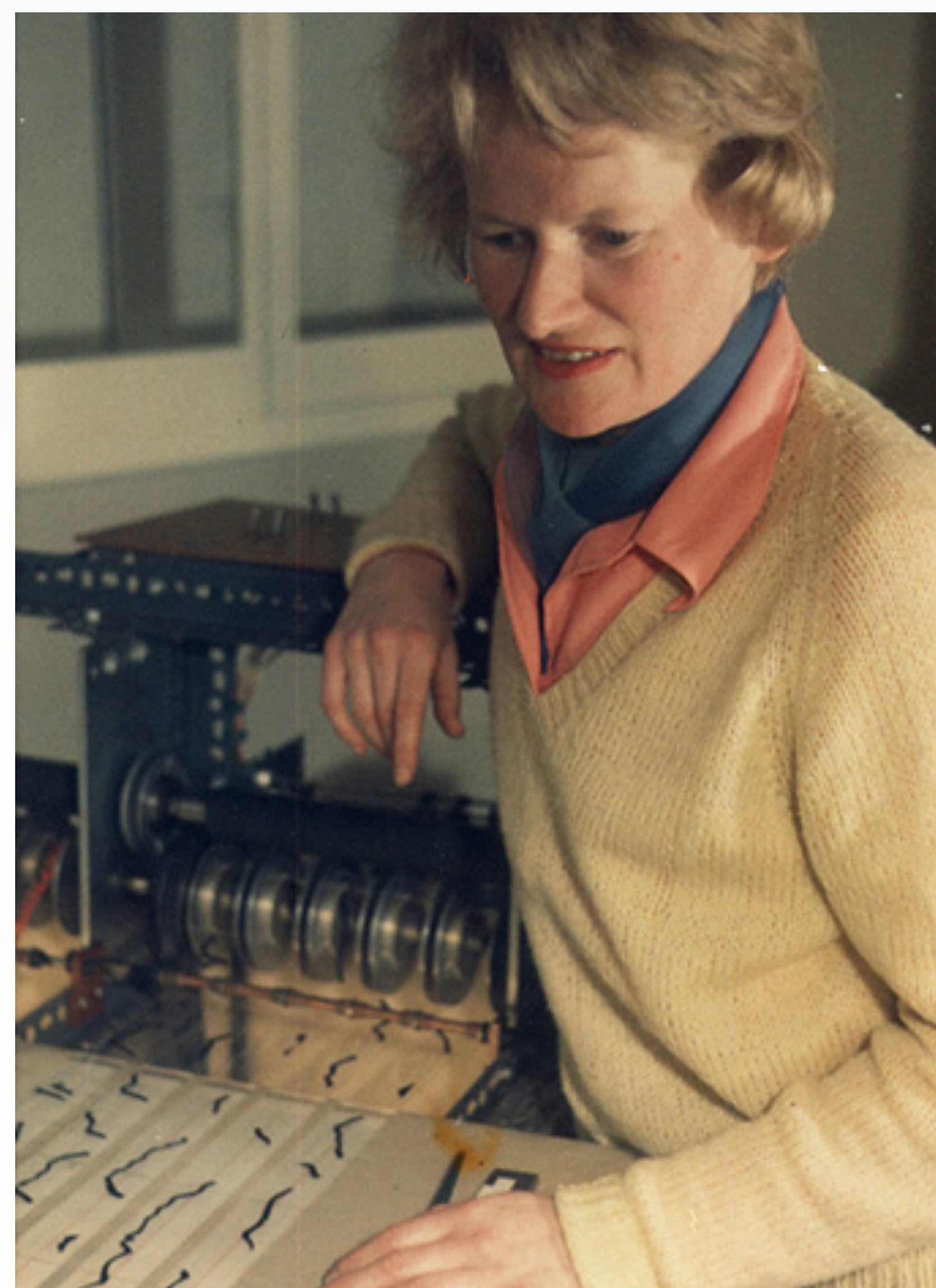
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Supervised by Dr. Jentery Sayers

DAPHNE ORAM: *AN INDIVIDUAL NOTE*

In 1943, Daphne Oram (1925-2003) began work at the BBC in London, UK where she became fascinated by the musical possibilities of magnetic tape recording and electronic technologies. After considerable resistance, in 1958 the BBC allowed Oram to set up what became known as the Radiophonic Workshop. However, the workshop focused primarily on sound effects for radio drama, rather than emergent forms of electronic music. Disillusioned, Oram left the BBC to establish an independent studio in a converted oast house in Kent to pursue her own research.

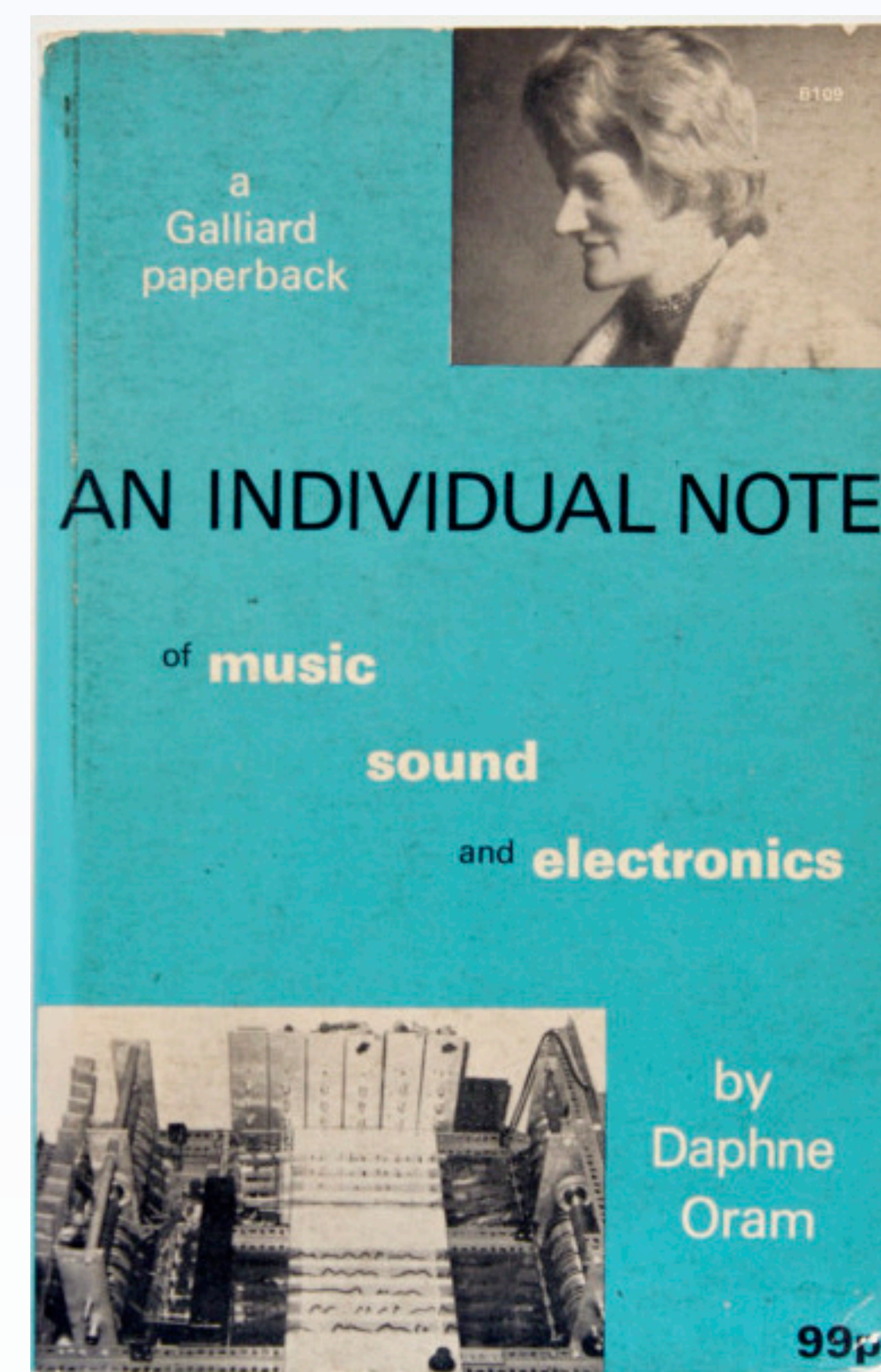
Oram documented her ideas about experimental sound-making practice in her 1972 book, *An Individual Note: On Music, Sound, and Electronics*. Written as a first-person exploration into the concepts of electronic music, Oram weaves metaphor, analogy, social commentary, and myth into her epistemological framework. This investigation into the design of the Oramics machine and Oram's scientific, literary, and artistic identity explores the extent to which her compositional process challenges a dichotomous understanding of objective and subjective modes of knowing.



Oramics was the name of Daphne Oram's "photoelectric digital/analogue compositional machine." It allowed the composer to manipulate the components of sound such as pitch, dynamics, vibrato, timbre, and rhythm.

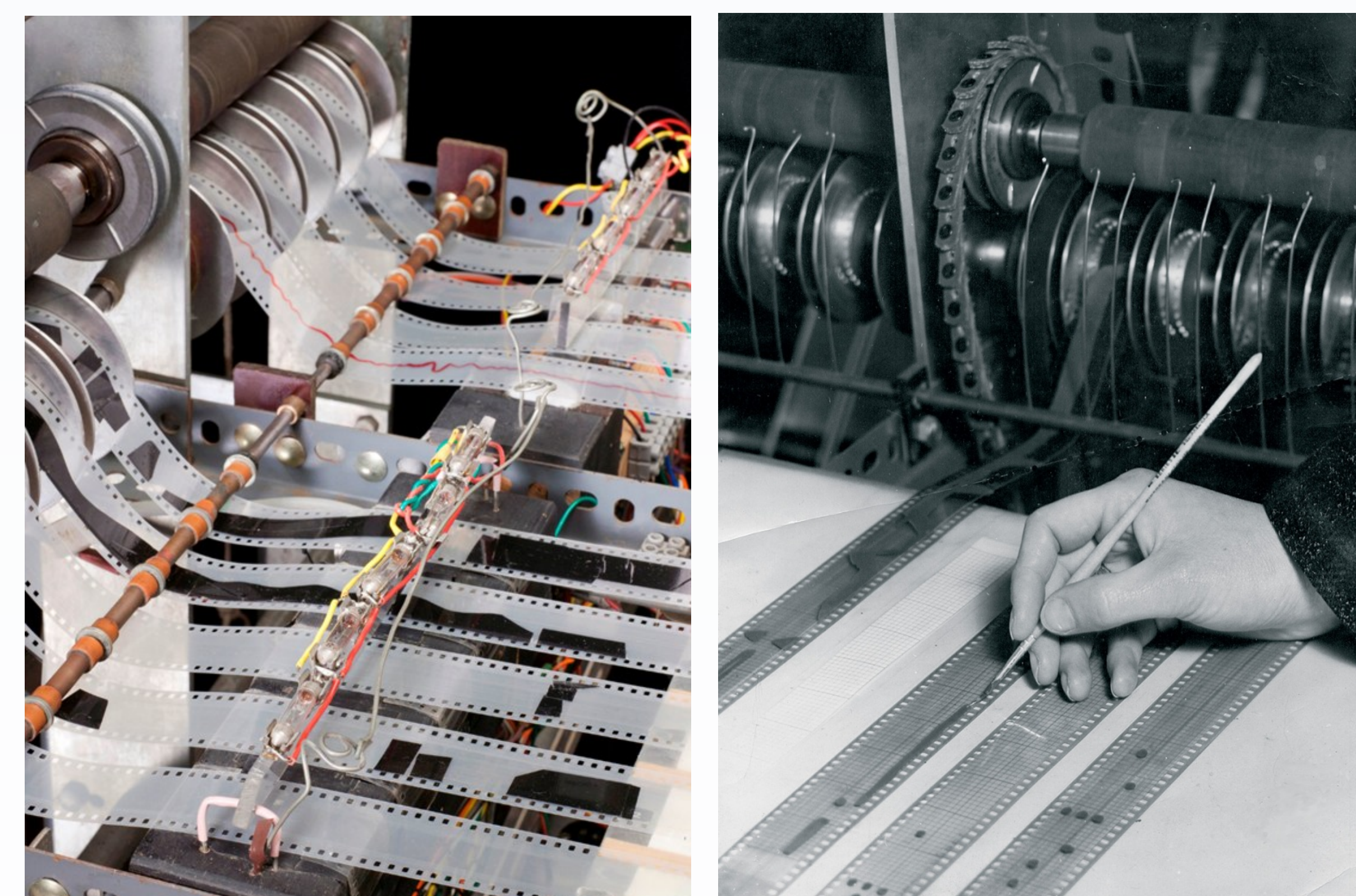
Here, Oram hand-draws waveform patterns onto strips of 35mm magnetic tape. These patterns were fed through the machine and read by a photoelectric sound-generating system

The impetus behind Oram's research was to give the composer a sonic blank canvas (magnetic tape) onto which they could paint "the colors of any sound you could imagine."



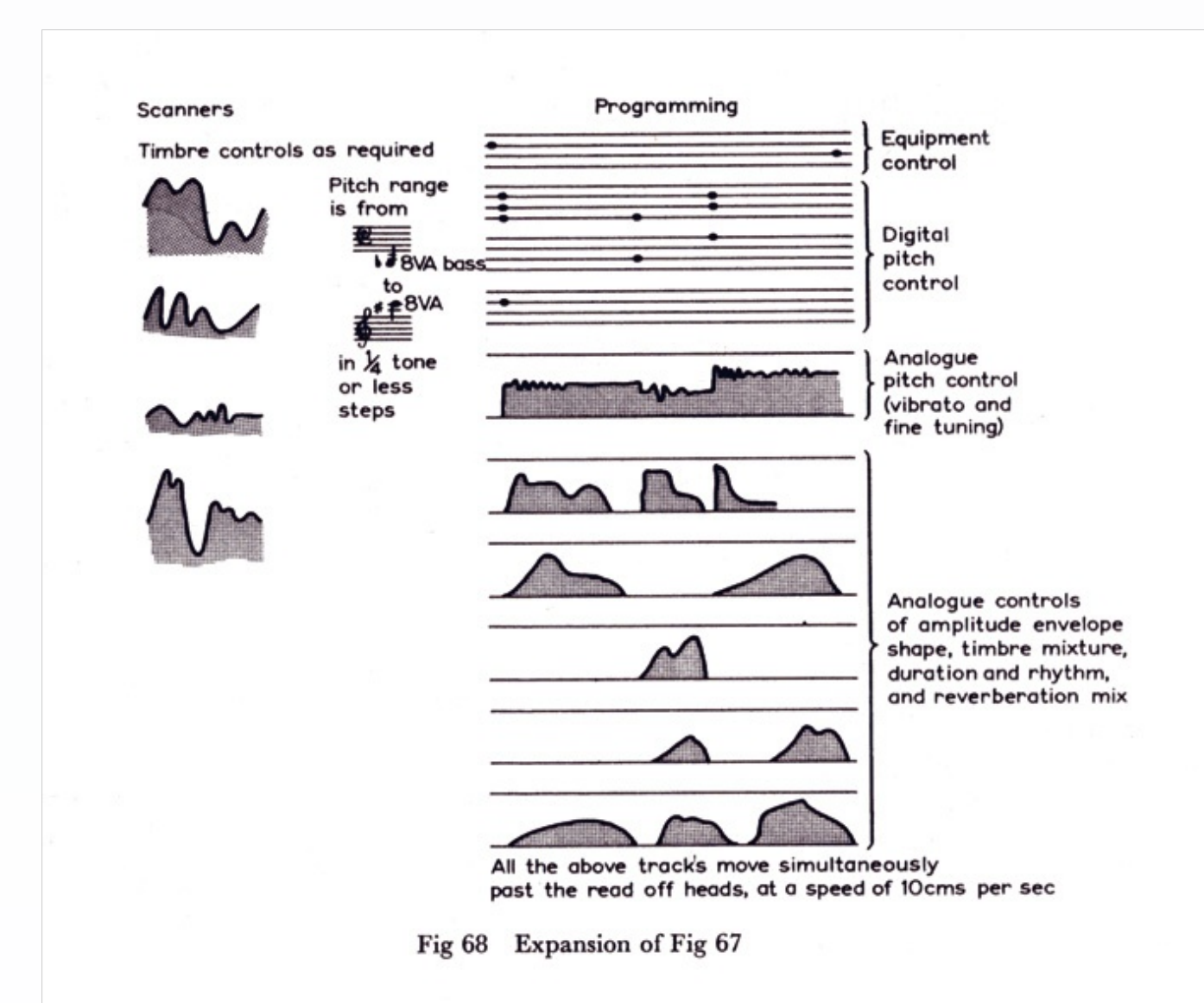
It is as if each human being is an instrument of concord and discord, consisting of thousands upon thousands of finely tuned circuits; each circuit with its own control of pitch and loudness, able to adjust its voice in harmony or dissonance, in balance and accord, so that it becomes part of the great pattern which makes the individual.

Daphne Oram,
An Individual Note (1972)



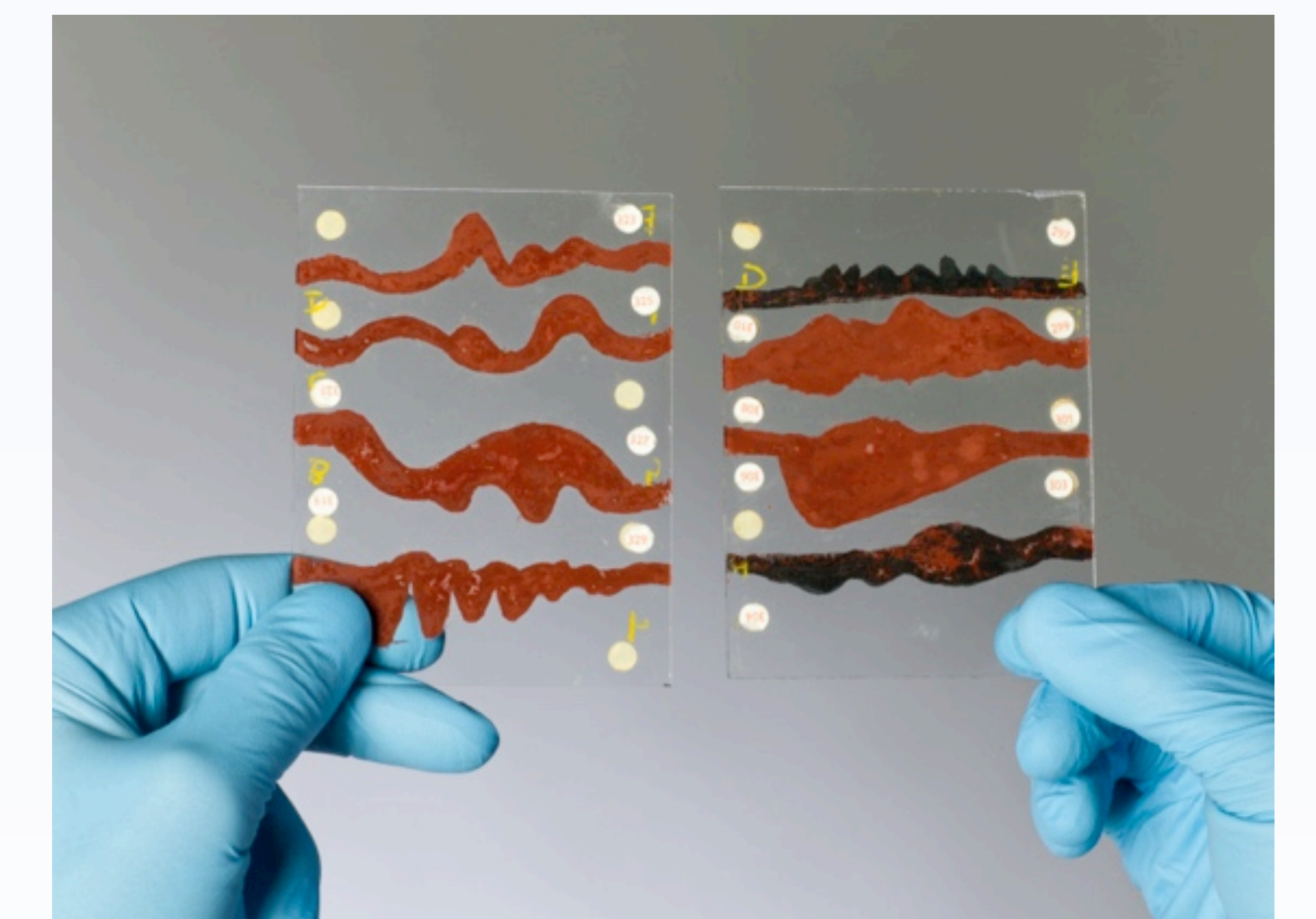
Feminist accountability requires a knowledge tuned to resonance, not dichotomy.

Donna Haraway,
Situated Knowledges (1988)



TUNING TO RESONANCE: ORAMICS & SITUATED KNOWLEDGE

Donna Haraway's feminist critique, *Situated Knowledges* was published more than a decade after Oram's *An Individual Note*. It addresses the philosophical foundation in which knowledge produced from the disembodied "conquering gaze from nowhere" is privileged as a method for understanding a "pure" objective reality. Instead, Haraway asserts that the knowing self is "constructed and stitched together imperfectly," allowing it to "see together" with another in "partial connection." Curiously, Haraway's view is analogous to Oram's characterization of both herself and the waveforms she moulds, fashions, guides, and caresses into existence as individuals immersed in a sea of resonant interactions.



Oram's playful speculations about the parallels between electronic and human phenomena, as well as her blending of visual and aural modes of understanding, are examples of what sound scholar Tara Rodgers calls "technological worlding." In Rodgers' essay "What, for me, constitutes life in a sound?": *Electronic Sounds as Lively and Differentiated Individuals*, building sound-worlds is a process in which the "waves of historical inheritance and possible futures of a given object" are apprehended rather than "presumed to contain fixed truths or accuracy in representation." Oramics takes into account the necessity for what Oram describes, a "mixture of both worlds, symmetrical and asymmetrical" from which "we can jump from aspect to aspect and compare results."

Oram's ideas represent sound and knowledge-making as a dialectical process for creating new tones – not from nowhere, but from a variety of imperfectly embodied subjectivities whose wave patterns shift between the material and semiotic.