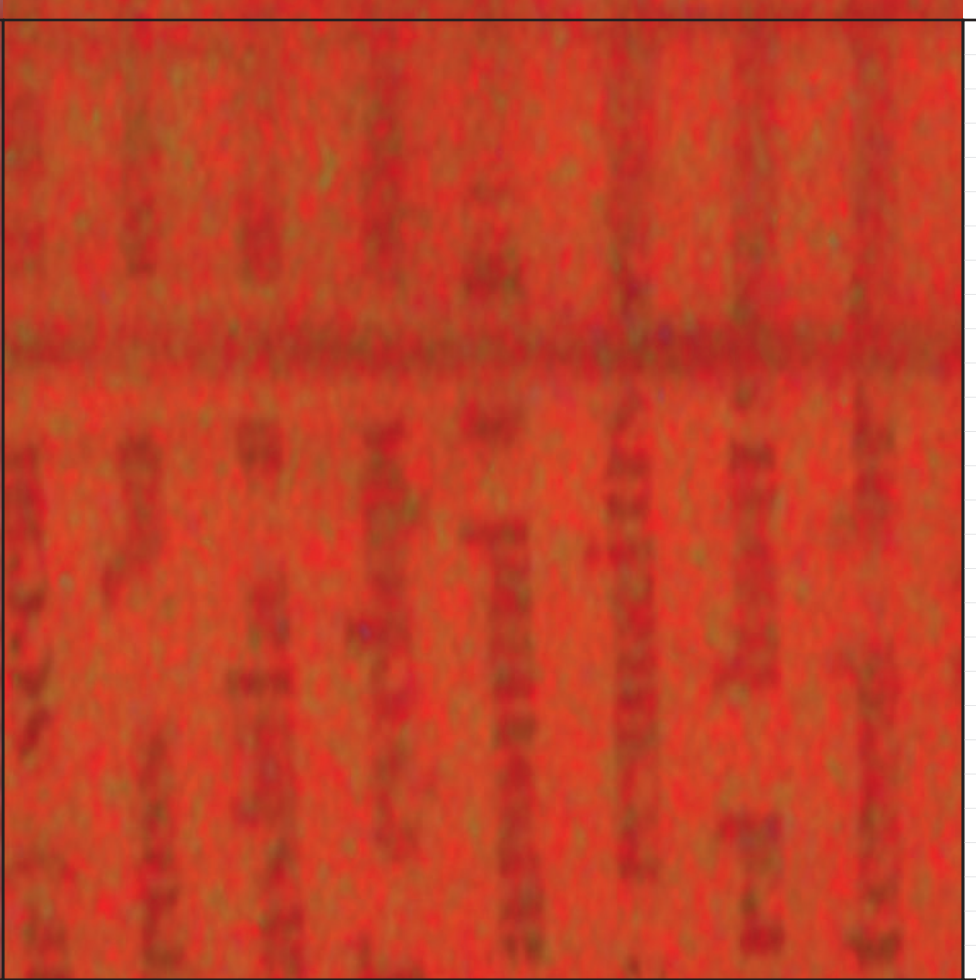
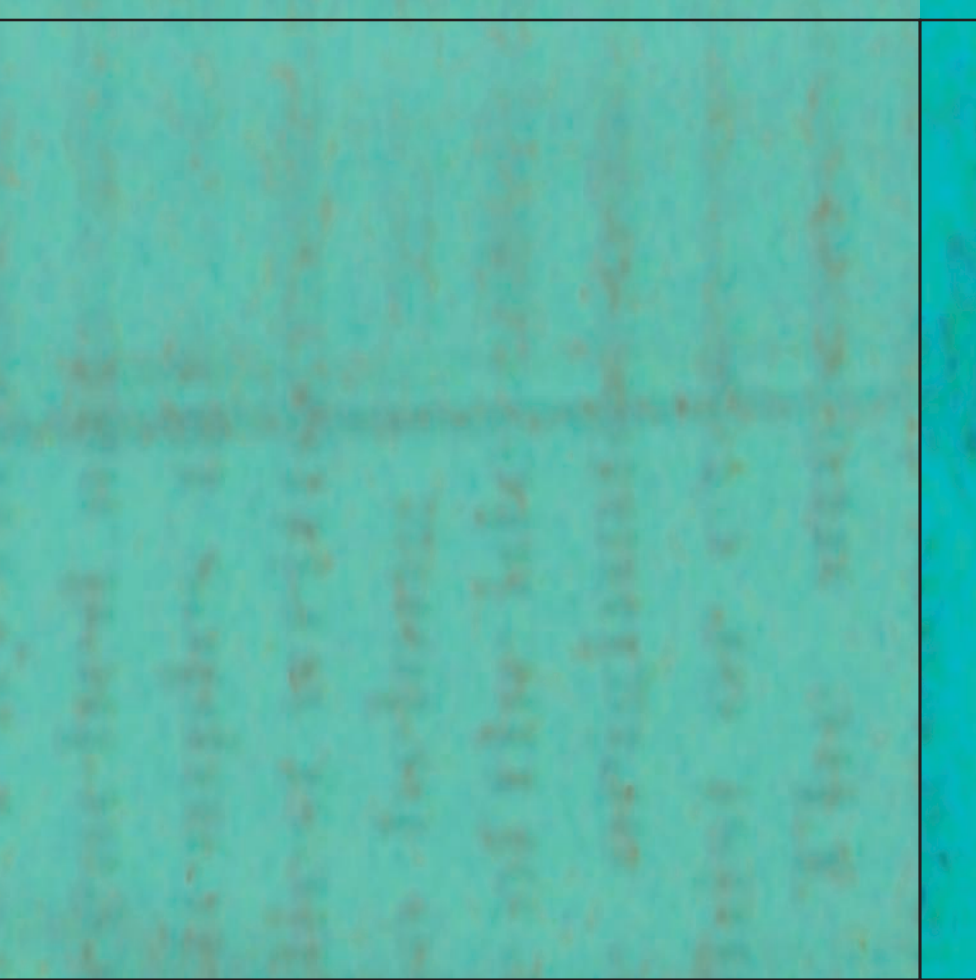
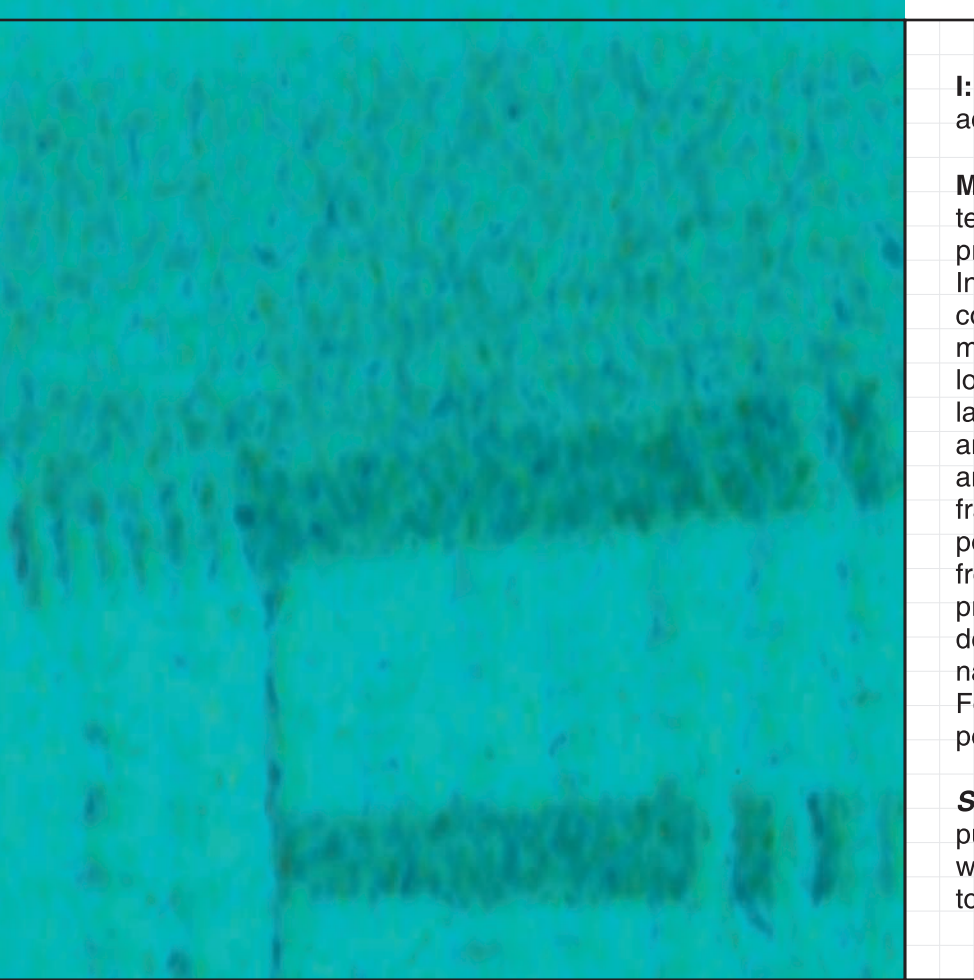
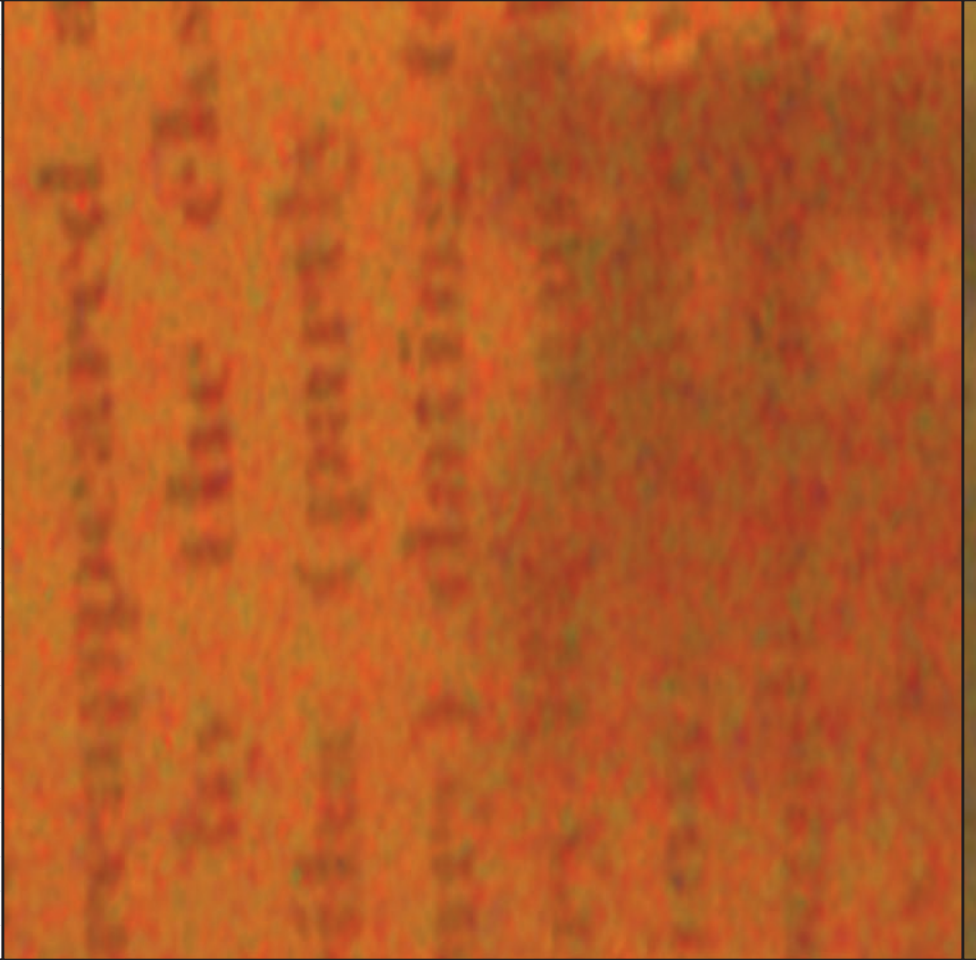
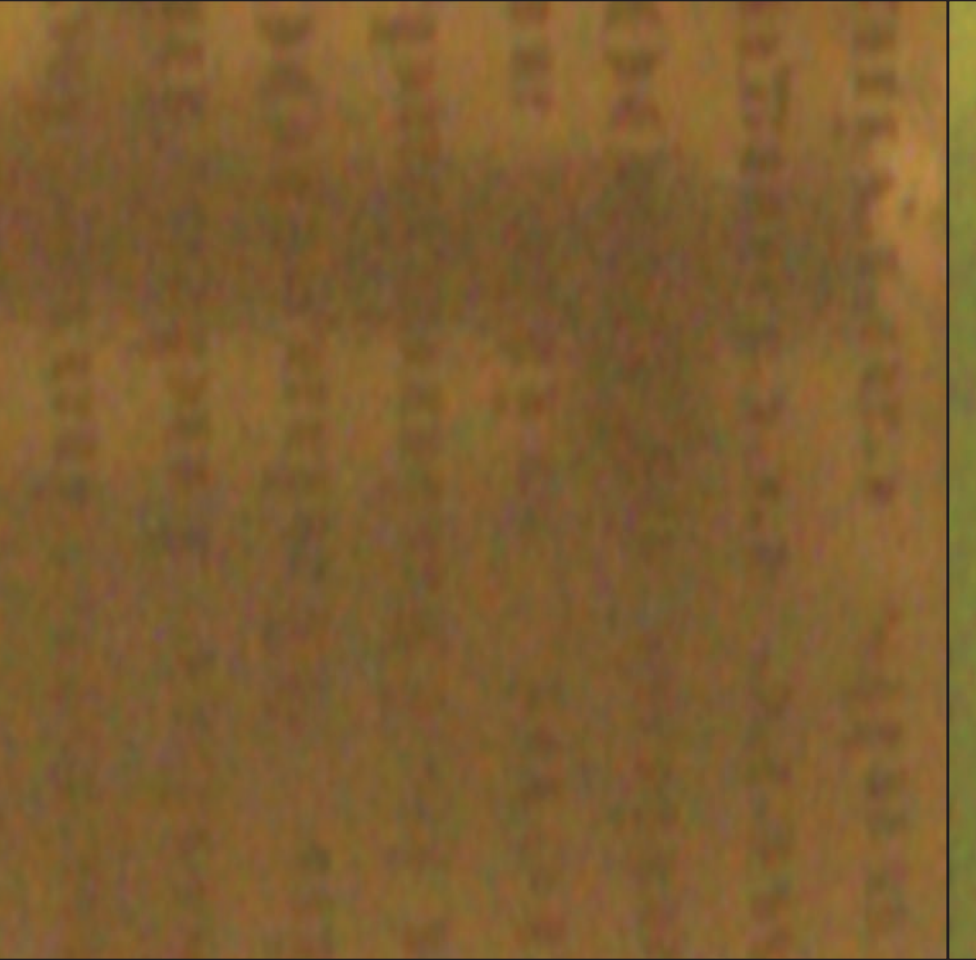
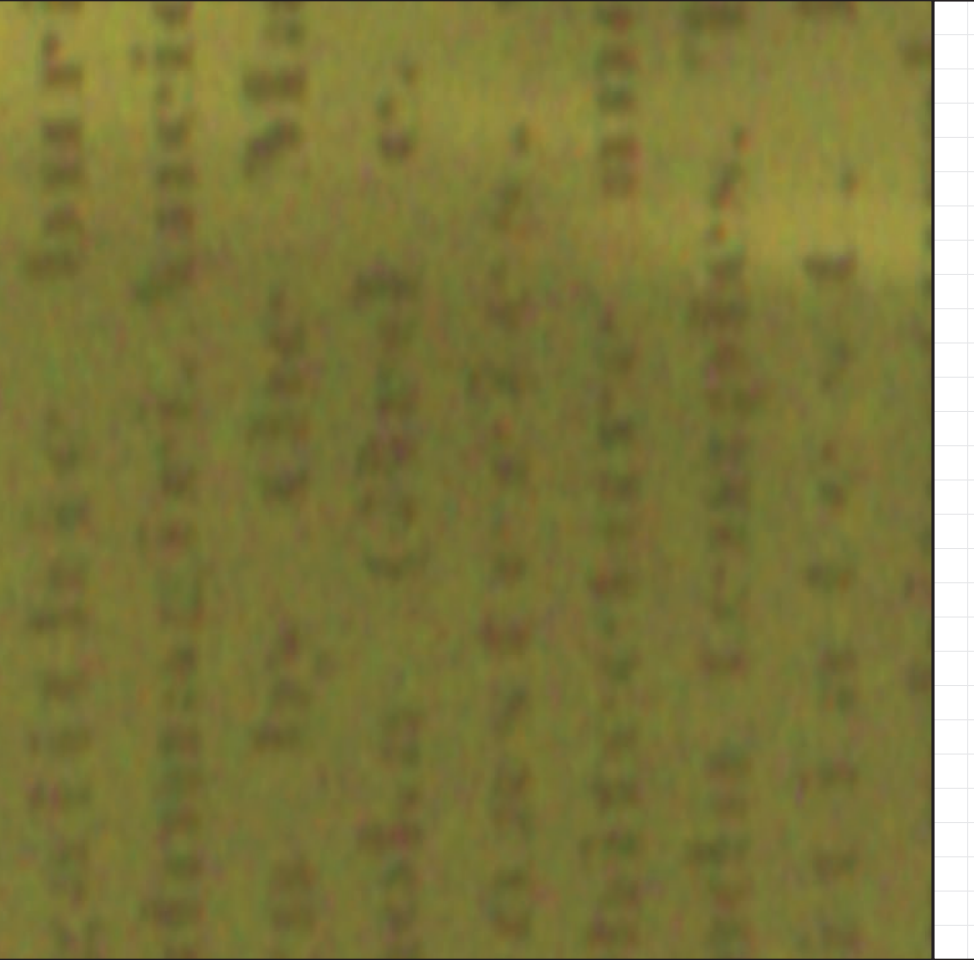

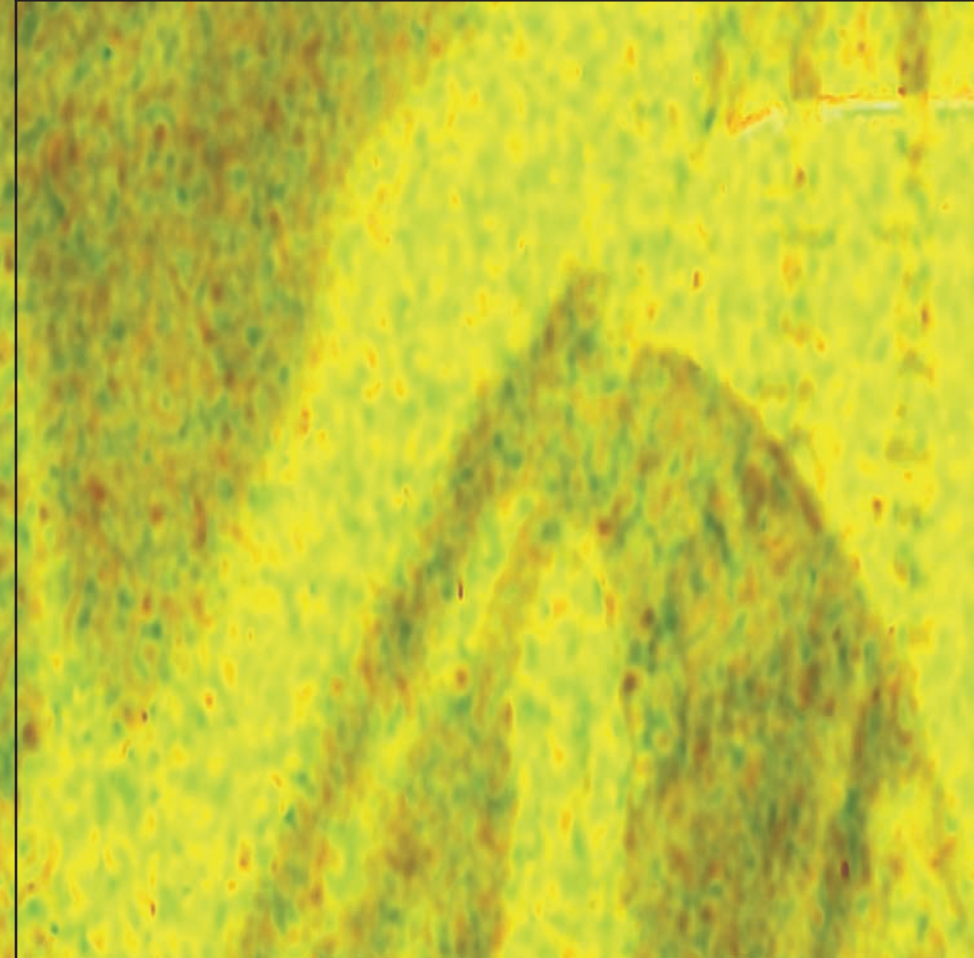
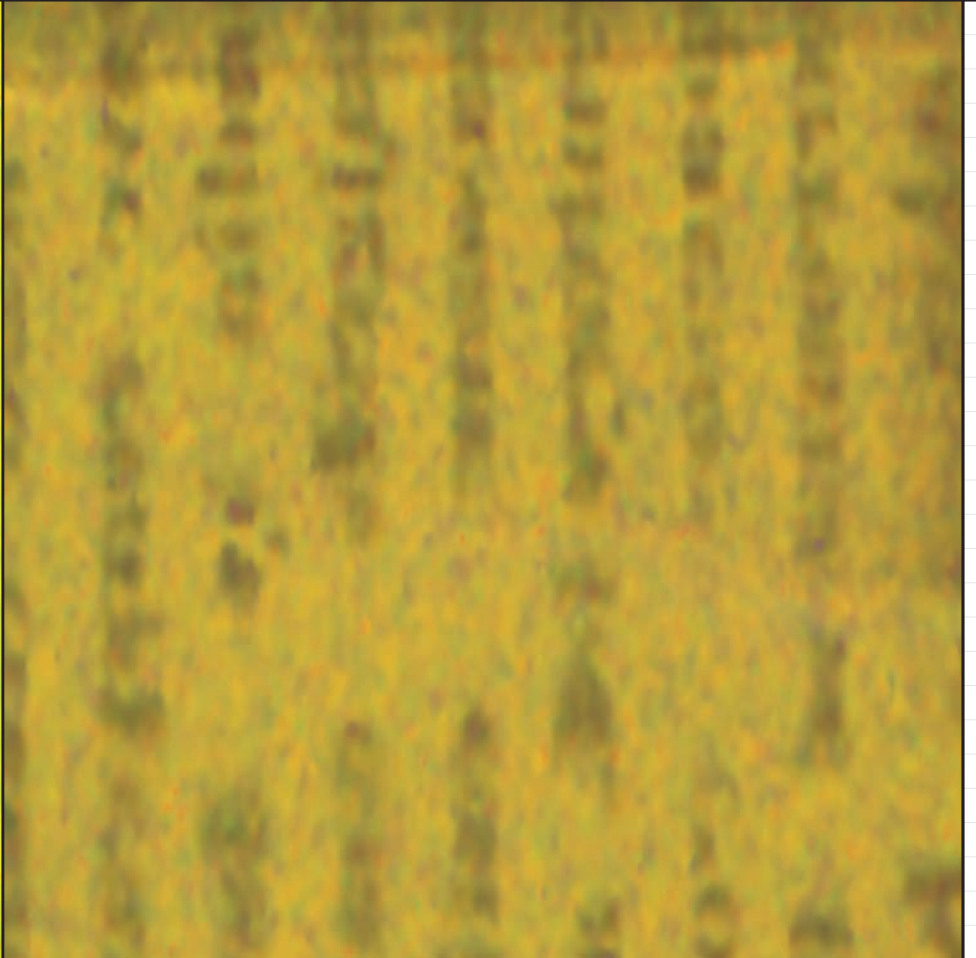
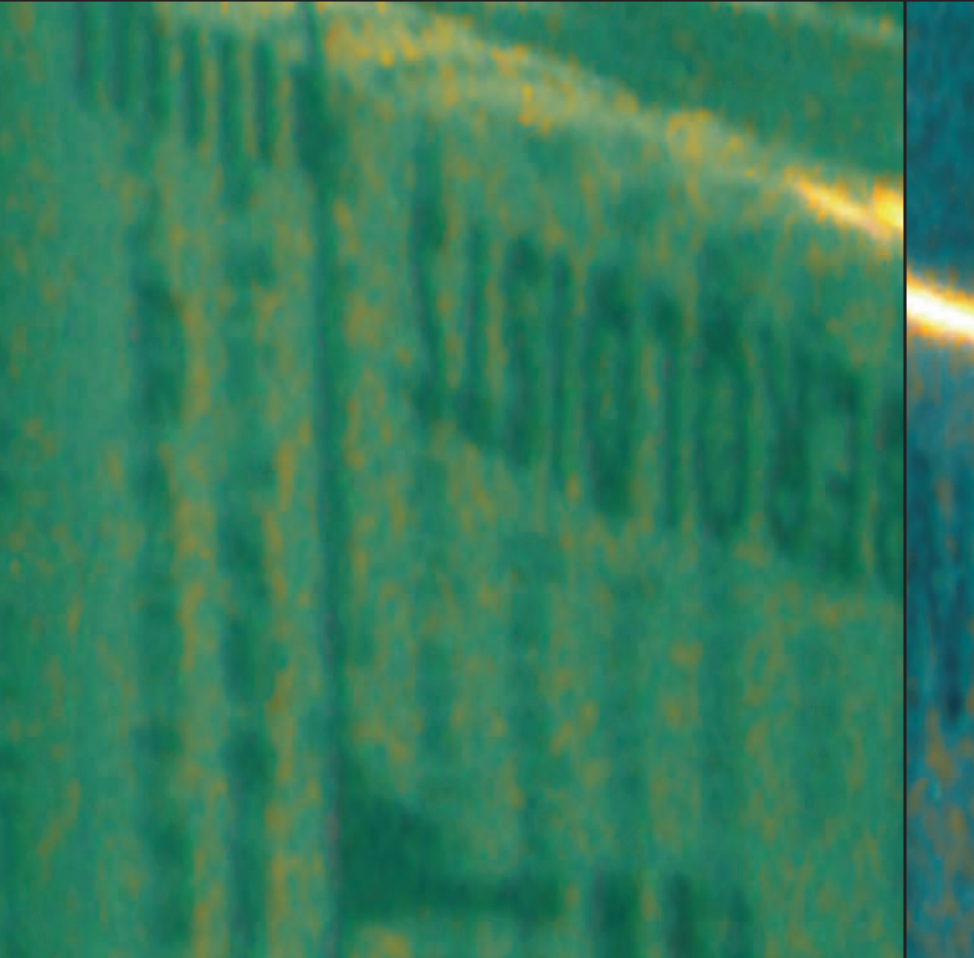
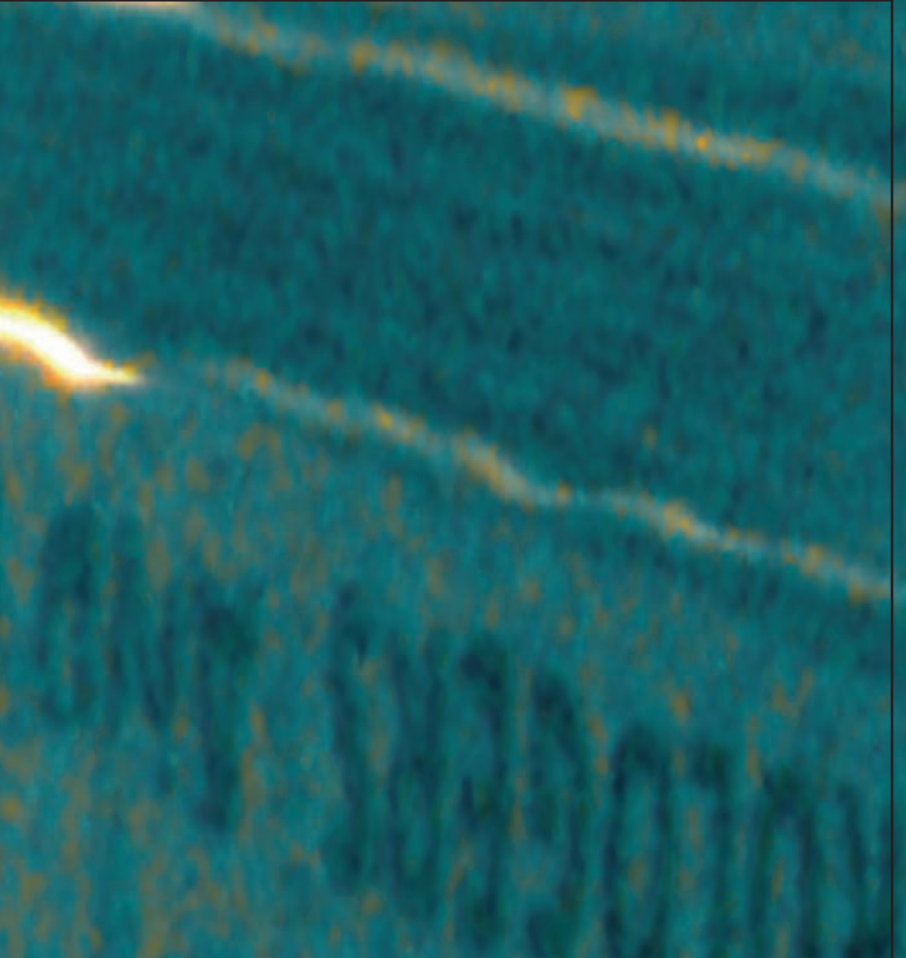
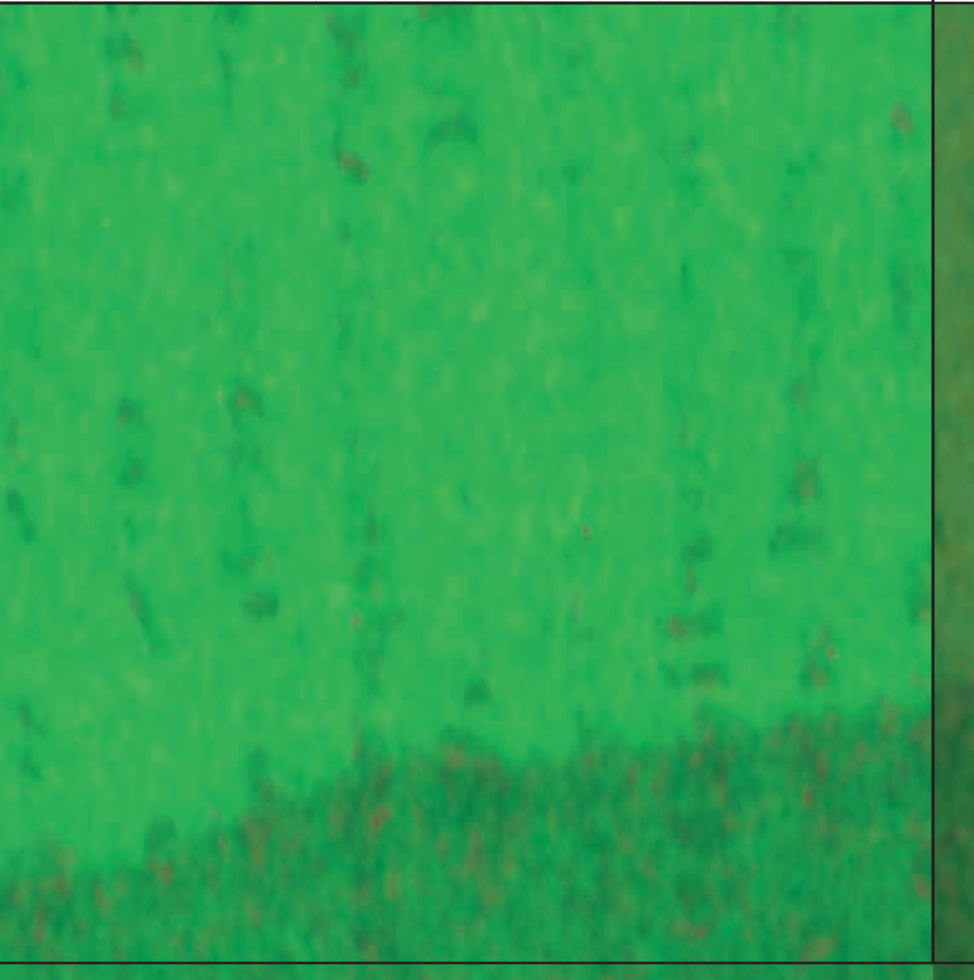
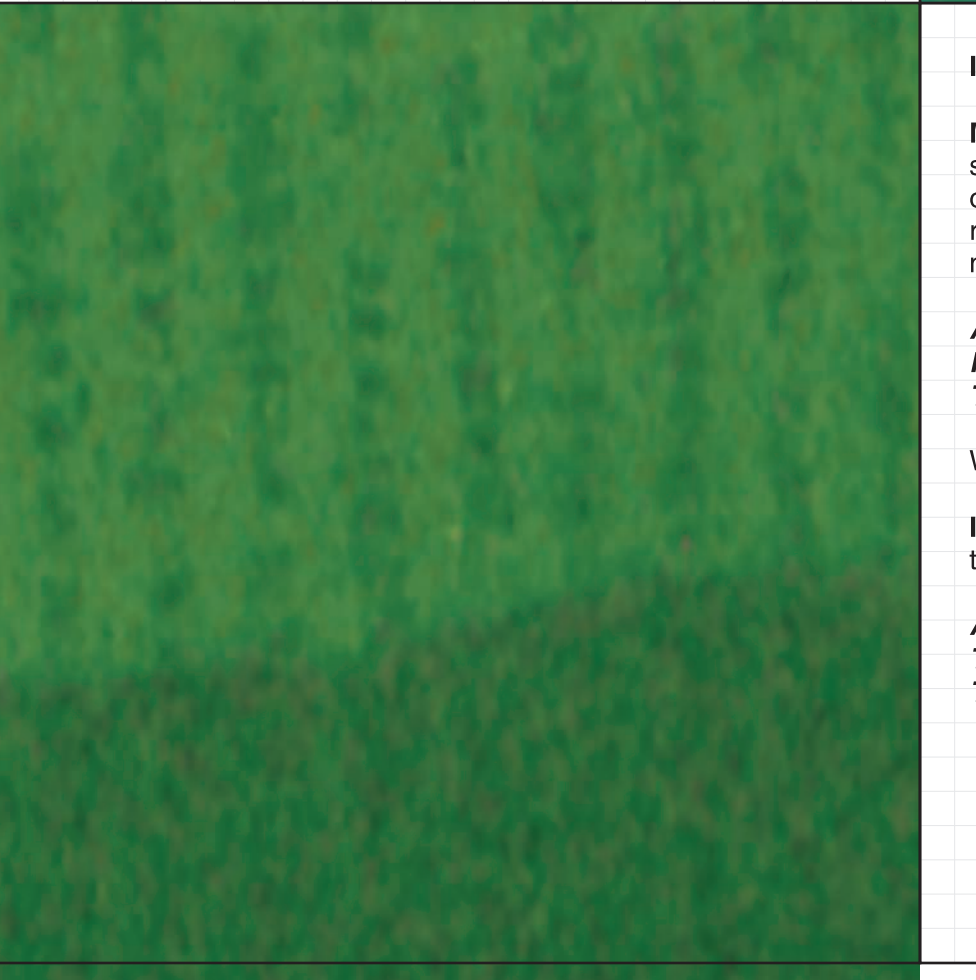



<p>KEYwording a project by Madhusree Dutta and Ines Schaber designed by Shikha Pandey</p>		<p>Ines (I): Madhusree, I think my starting point for our keyword project was your public appearances in Berlin, where you, pretty much every time you spoke, challenged a term that we commonly use here. The relation between words and things or actions touched other questions in our project, namely in the tagging of films in an archive and in the search for terms that are able to describe our contemporary practices. But let's start with the first part: one of the terms that you commented on was <i>underground</i>. Could you say why you challenged it?</p> <p>Madhusree (M): The word <i>underground</i> simply means under the ground, below the surface. In Western cultures it denotes radical movements, subversive activities, anti-hegemonic practices, certain cult formations etc. In the colder climate and within the architecture of the region, basement is understood as the x-site of sub-culture and alternative living. But in India, and many other Asian-African civilisations, basements are not a prevalent architectural practice. Subversion in these cultures is practiced not in the closeness of the basement of a building but in the openness of the street. A fugitive does not hide in the basement but veils the self within cover of the public. More cultural subversions take place within the open and porous sites in the public domain than in the intended seclusion of designated spaces. The difference in the demographic patterns between the two societies also causes this difference in strategies. It also happens because housing in poorer societies is scarce, and the warmer climate encourages and facilitates people to stay outdoor. Hence while sites of the normative remain indoors, the subculture unfurls in the labyrinths of the street.</p>	<p>Another factor that comes into play here is the structure of state agencies and family units. I am dividing the sites by a simple logic – the outdoor under the state agencies and the indoor under the individual residents-citizens. In Eastern civilization people live mostly in hierarchical families of different sizes and thus the indoor space remains much more under patriarchal vigil. On the other hand much of the time the state agencies in non-welfare societies are not too alert in their vigil on the streets. Especially in a country like India, with a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural populace of varied degrees of literacy, identity papers as a device to control the public place is not very useful. Hence the public place, in some sense, offers more space to non-normative identities and activities than the private domain.</p> <p>Yet, in other contexts, <i>underground</i> is often used in India to similar effect as in western countries – underground cinema, underground literature, underground cadre, underground mobilisation and so on. It comes from our need for a common adjective that can be used in the trans-lingual context of the country. Hence <i>underground</i>, without any experiential backing and visual reference, has come to stay in circulation, and then we worry as to why we lack the culture of <i>underground</i> the way it is in the west.</p>			<p>I: Which were the other terms that you felt needed to be challenged according to our different cultural context?</p> <p>M: <i>Avant-garde</i> could be one such word. As you know very well, the term came into circulation out of European and American radical art practices mainly in the post war years. But the corresponding period, for India (and also many other countries), coincided with the last phase of colonialisation. In opposition to the homogenising agenda of modernism perpetuated by the colonialists, what was thought forward looking at that point was to re-visit and foreground various local cultural languages and practices. Of course it was an overtly nationalist agenda and was conducive to revivalist discourse, and later it indeed became an ideological quagmire. But the point to remember is that the broad framework of intellectual activities was seeped within the discourse of post-colonial nation building. My discomfort towards the term stems from the fact that unlike the western <i>avant-garde</i>, the forward looking practices in post colonial countries like India, to a great extent, cannot detach themselves from the pedagogical agenda of nation making. The nation-state relationship in this context is not all that umbilically related. For some related reasons antagonism between critical practices and popular culture too are not as sharp as it is in the European context.</p> <p>Subculture could be another term. In our experiences terms such as public culture, hybrid culture, street culture, and community culture would broadly cover the same space. And the political action would be to protect these practices from being categorised as 'sub'.</p>
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<p>Looking at it from the other end, <i>squatter</i> would be a term that needs to be adopted on this side of the globe. In a city like Bombay a very large number of people live in what can be best termed as unauthorised dwellings, the official word to identify them is dreadful – <i>encroacher</i>. The political connotation of squatting is completely lost in the word 'encroaching'. The vertical and definitive physical movement of squatting is killed in the horizontal and uncertain crawling movement of encroaching.</p> <p>Then, of course, there are terms that have jumped ahead of the queue to the foreground in the last couple of decades – <i>Embedded</i> after the American media in the company of the allied army in Iraq; <i>Repay</i> after the IMF intervention in underdeveloped countries; <i>Global</i> as it is associated only with business Corporations, and <i>Traffic</i> which is used for illegal labour migration in the western world but in South Asia is related to sex trade and thus is invoked specially to control women's mobility.</p> <p>These continuous shifts in the meaning and practice of spoken words can be quite unsettling when words are used generically to categorise films and/or other cultural productions within whichever ideological and political thinking.</p>				<p>I: The question of giving something a name received another connotation here in Berlin; in the context of the Arsenal as well. When they published their last analogue distribution catalogue in 1987, it carried a description of the films as well as a series of indexes that were meant to make the films accessible through various ordering schemes. Besides the lists of films, sorted by directors, countries, and a register of the German titles, the catalogue included a list of keywords.</p> <p>But during the translation from an analogue list to a data bank the practice of keyword was abandoned and hence the distribution catalogue of 1987 was the last document that offered a search through keywords. The current data bank consists of technical information and synopsis.</p> <p>The abandonment of keywords equalled the doubt on the terms used. As Arsenal's film curator Stefanie Schulte Strathaus explained, standard categorisations used to sort films and make them accessible in a popular form would exclude many films, as the given categories do not and cannot be applied to many of the films that Arsenal is collecting. To apply the given formats and convention would mean to consciously simplify the films' approach and shrink their scope. Schulte Strathaus' remark might be a reminder that our use of language in annotating our practices is far more complex than the day to day dealing in the archive suggests. However, I found that many of the words that were used in the '87 catalogue were signaling the Arsenal's political agenda – they retrospectively stand as key words for the practice and program of the institution: <i>disarmament, alternative life forms, poverty, labour, outsiders, homosexuality, colonialism, feminism, war/peace</i> etc.</p>	<p>What I liked about the former Arsenal keywords list is not actually the tagging itself, it is rather that the words signal what was important for the practitioners at the time. The words do not necessarily describe films, but envelop them in a political culture of the time and thus, perform a very different agenda than that of the "real" archives. Thus, picking up on the practice of tagging films, or inventing new words in relation to contemporary and past practices, is also a question about where we position ourselves today.</p> <p>M: Are we to make a distinction between keywording and categorisation? Is categorisation more typological and thus universally accessed whereas keywords are more idiomatic and thus subjective? Practice-enabling vocabulary, as suggested by you, could be a key here. Does that mean that the pre-mediated cultural memory of the words can be challenged by aligning them to contemporary 'action based' practices? Could we collate the various memories of a word as a precursor to the search or, formulating differently, dislodging the value neutrality of the search tool by collating various memories and narratives around the keywords itself? Are we to achieve this by deliberately disassociating the words from the normative usage and attempting to expand its elasticity by the agenda of 'action'?</p> <p>To start with, the practice of keywording cultural texts was invoked to create a navigation system to understand the overlappings, permeations, contradictions and complimentary interfaces between various cultures and its numerous practices. But as it turned out, our memory of the language practice has often preceded our desire for the un-read.</p>	
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<p>I: Let's have a fresh look at all the keyword projects in the last four decades, where we saw that the reasons why people used the scheme of the alphabet changed massively. Raymond Williams' keywords project in the Seventies was meant to be an inquiry into a Marxist vocabulary—a record of a body of problem-laden words and their meanings. The Arsenal's list seems not only to have been (as one could expect) a tagging of films to enable access to a collection, but a vocabulary for action of a cultural institution. In the case of <i>World Social Forum-India Social Forum</i> the role of the document has been "to facilitate and consolidate the diverse political energies that had emerged in the wake of globalisation and invasion of Iraq in the first decade of the 21st century within a loosely formatted organism". And the <i>Dictionary of War or the Atlas of Transformation</i> turn the "key" into a concept, marking the search for words that might enable practice and action rather than a search for meaning. There is a massive shift from the search for meaning in language towards a practice-enabling vocabulary, one that organises writing, but also one that tries to invent action.</p> <p>M: I am tempted at this point to propose that the organism of words in this kind of projects can be read as a self-sustained text, maybe even as a manifesto and not as a tool. A manifesto identifies its agenda at the very beginning and then proposes strategies to actions. But tool as in artisanal (and pre-modern) practice is much more supple.</p>	<p>As Richard Sennett has so elegantly argued in <i>The Craftsman</i>, the artisanal tools have the ability to respond to every material shift in the society and modify themselves ever-so-slightly at each juncture that the changes mostly go unnoticed. I am aware of the fact that discursively artisanal practices are not perceived as critical practice. But it has the ability to modify itself in response to differences in location, climate, requirement and societal structure. Since it does so without any palpable agitation it goes unnoticed and thus does not get recorded as critical or political.</p> <p>For the sake of argument at this juncture I would keep image making in the artisanal category and word making in the modernist category. Though I must admit that at times this arrangement may also be reversed. For example, in a set up where the image is iconic and the language is hybrid. Thus what we are debating about is a possible methodology of weaving a modernist parameter into an artisanal practice.</p> <p>I: It is interesting that you mention the manifesto. As part of the Living Archive project, it was often mentioned that we should try to formulate a manifesto regarding our contemporary practice(s). But maybe one should think about a different form of manifesto regarding a living archive, where things, as you say, might "modify themselves at each juncture" to stay or become alive, again. In the introduction to his book <i>Delirious New York</i>, Rem Koolhaas joined two distinct terms: evidence and manifesto.</p>	<p>He argues that the fatal weakness of manifestos lies in their "inherent lack of evidence" and that Manhattan's problem is that "it is a mountain range of evidence without manifesto." What would be needed, in his view, would be a retroactive manifesto—one that would make use of the piles of unused evidence to develop a prospect.</p> <p>M: Yes, a city can be a good metaphor for archiving. Like an archive a city is always a work in progress, a store house of evidences (a good part of which is yet to be processed), and forever modifying the tools to cope with its own dizzying changes. One important aspect of urbania is its complex network – of labour, goods, strategies, languages and cultures; a network that is never tired of evolving newer interfaces. Can we imagine the grid of an archive after the map of the urban network – leading, excavating but also hybridising, elasticising, recycling? Then the words too can be imagined as the navigation method that is temporal and ever evolving.</p> <p>I: In a similar way, one could say that the Arsenal links the practice of collecting evidence to the production of an activity from it. At the beginning, or at the end, an arsenal is a storehouse for weapons.</p>			<p>I: Do you have other suggestions for terms?</p> <p>M: Warmed up by the above exchange, at this point, I would bring in some words that, in my opinion, either have potential for hybridity, a kind of capability of expanding and altering itself or they are produced retroactively. Obviously, at some other juncture the choice of words may change completely.</p> <p>Absence Analog Bazaar/Market English Fake Food Hand Homeland Islamophobia Paper Plastic Repay Secondhand Transit Veil Queue...</p> <p>What would be your words?</p> <p>I: I guess in the context of this project, reflecting the archive as well as the action of the Arsenal, my terms would be:</p> <p>Arsenal East Gelände/Terrain Geschichten Erzählen/Story Telling Streik/Strike Gesture Mask Property Punk Screen Testimony Verhältnisse/Relations...</p>	<p>KEYwording is part of Living Archive – Archive Work as a Contemporary Artistic and Curatorial Practice</p> <p>PUBLISHER Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art Berlin PRINTED AT Spenta Multimedia, Mumbai, India MAY, 2013</p> <p>Publications within KEYwording:</p> <p>ANALOG Rajula Shah ARSENAL Erika and Ulrich Gregor BAZAAR / MARKET Kaushik Bhaumik ENGLISH Arundhati Subramaniam FOOD Nanna Heidenreich and Daniel Hendrickson RELATIONS / VERHÄLTNISSE / RELACIONES Florian Wüst SCREEN Erik Görnigch with Alexander Boldt, Hans-Joachim Faltzer, Anna Hoffmann, Gesa Knolle, Birgit Kohler, Angelika Ramlow, Markus Ruff, Stefanie Schulte Strathaus, Uli Ziemons GESCHICHTEN ERZÄHLEN / STORY TELLING Merle Kröger and Philip Scheffner STATSCHKA / STRIKE / STREIK Sergej M. Eisenstein GELÄNDE / TERRAIN Riki Kalbe and Wolfgang Kil TRANSIT Madhusree Dutta VEIL Flavia Agnes</p> 
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