

Chance Meeting

Miguel Wandschneider

The oeuvre of Miguel Soares (Braga, 1970) has been, from very early on, indelibly marked by his interest in the genre of science fiction, the artificial environments in which life unfolds in technologically advanced societies and the vertiginous pace of modern-day technological development as a decisive factor in our experience of reality. In the first half of the 1990s, he was particularly invested in the re-use and manipulation of pre-existing photographic images and the making of sculptures that took industrial design as a field of references. In the following years, a significant part of his work took the form of sculptures and installations, made with mass produced materials and simple technological devices, which depicted characters, objects and situations belonging to hypothetical worlds from science fiction. During this period, he also produced video works that opened up the universe of science fiction to the iconography and aesthetic codes of computer games, foreshadowing the 3D animations to which he devoted himself from the end of that decade onwards.

In fact, since the end of the 1990s, Miguel Soares' main body of work is composed of laboriously constructed 3D animations, indebted to a do-it-yourself ethos, which usually draw their inspiration from the manifold streams of science fiction. In many of these works, Miguel Soares pursues his interest in themes from the contemporary world, which are filtered through an imaginary projection into a more or less distant, but entirely plausible, future: the spectre of militarisation and totalitarianism (*Time for Space*, from 2000), the anonymity and atomisation of social life, as well as the loss of our direct relationship with nature (*Archibunk3r Associates*, 2000), the increasing pollution of the skies and seas (*SpaceJunk beta 1.0*, 2001, and *H2O*, 2004), the threat of a major nuclear war (*Time Zones*, 2003), or the survival of the human species (*Place in Time*, 2005). More recent 3D animations depict a world in which automation has freed humans from work (*2048*, from 2016) or in which robots have feelings and free will (*LuzAzul*, 2018).

These fictional narratives condense a painstaking work of figurative composition and the careful cinematic construction of points of view, camera movements and sequences. No less important in engaging the viewer is the organic and symbiotic relationship that is established between image and sound. Until 2005, Miguel Soares constructed the soundtrack of his animations from music created in many different

styles (Tuxedomoon, Combustible Edison, Funki Porcini, Sack & Blumm, Roberto Musci & Giovanni Venosta, Negativland), but also, from 2002 onwards, from themes that he himself composed through the manipulation and sequencing of samples taken from the Internet, television, films or music (firstly in 2002, and then later in 2006, two CDs of his own music were released by Variz). In another line of work, in 2005 and 2006 he used some of his musical themes for the soundtrack of videos composed from images taken from old films available at the Prelinger archives. And from 2006 until 2010, he made a series of predominantly abstract 3D animations that offer a synesthetic visual translation to other of his musical tracks.

For his exhibition at Rialto6, Miguel Soares is showing four new animations.

As soon as we enter the space, we come across *Encounters* (2023), which depicts a chance encounter during a night stroll with an enigmatic object that seems to be of alien origin. Although not unprecedented, it is uncommon for Miguel Soares to combine images created using 3D-modelling and animation tools with footage of actual places. By placing that object in a real context, the artist reinforces the idea of an encounter with an unknown entity from another world.

The same procedure of combining virtual

images with actual footage is used in *MetaTouch* (2023), shown in the basement. Two identical spheres of liquid metal fly in perfect harmony, touching each other from time to time and teleporting, whenever the touch is deeper, to another location, where they continue their journey. We are, once again, led to think about entities from another world. The accompanying hypnotic sound – a tanpura drone – opens up the possibility of other, metaphysical meanings. Both *Encounters* and *MetaTouch*, it is worth mentioning, are direct descendants of *Wabane* (2008), in which a liquid metal helmet-shaped object undergoes a number of mutations as it makes its way through the interior of a traditional Japanese home.

Once we arrive at the first floor, we are immediately struck by a large-scale projection of *ChronoCube* (2023). We are taken on a journey into a fractal space suggestive of a city from a distant future captured at different stages in its history. This animation is constructed as a *mise en abyme*, the fractal space growing continuously through an iterative process. A sense of nightmare sets in, something which the soundtrack, a drone piece composed by the artist using a synthesizer, only reinforces.

Shown in the mezzanine, *Assembly Line* (2017-23) brings to mind *MetaTouch*. It also focuses on two identical objects and their interaction, in this case robots from an assembly line

which awake from their state of rest to communicate with each other for a brief moment. These figures are the latest iteration in a long line of objectual and virtual representations of robots in Miguel Soares' oeuvre that started in the mid-1990s.

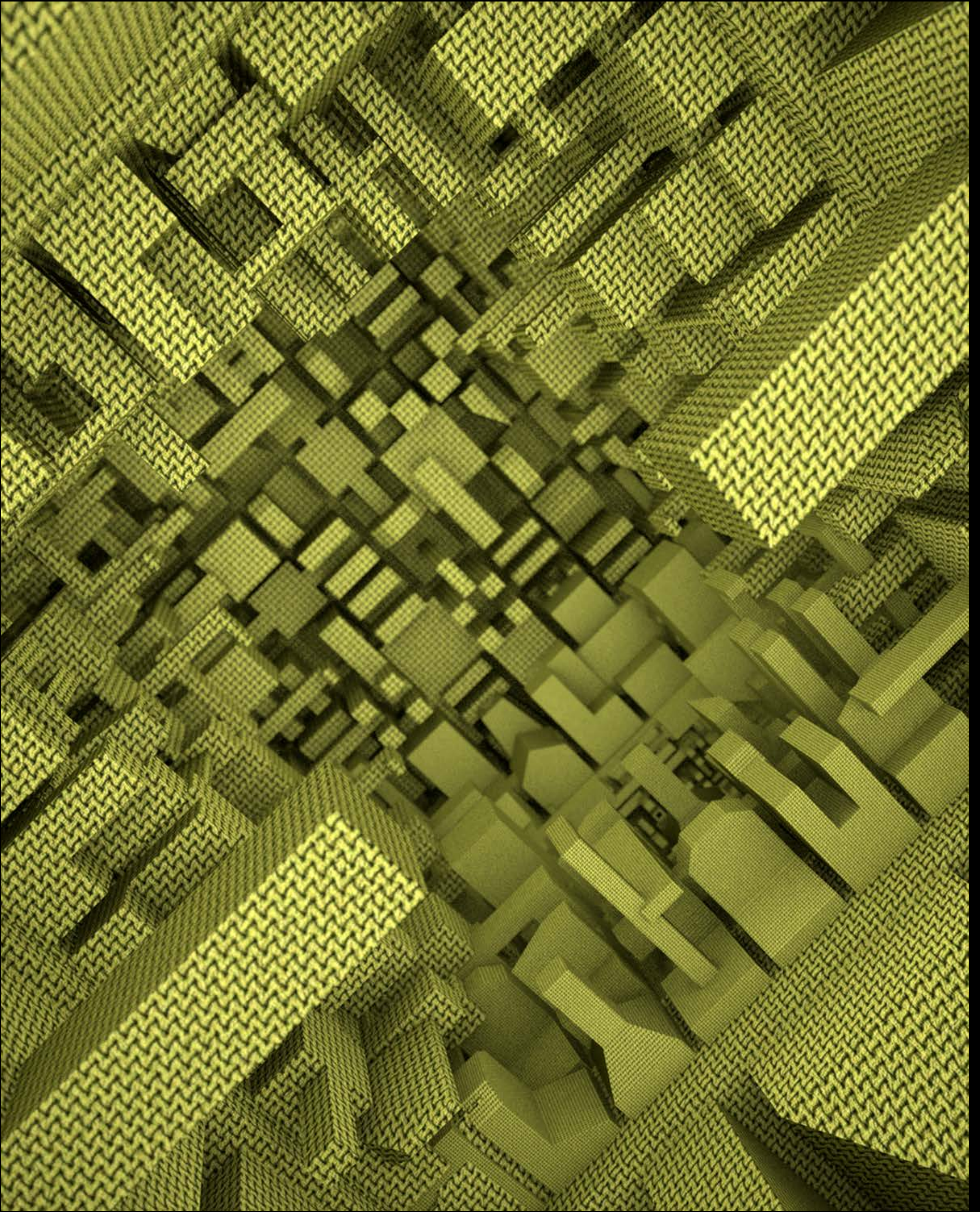
The exhibition comes to a close with a kind of *post scriptum*: three animation works from the first half of the 2000s are shown on separate monitors.

SpaceJunk beta 1.0 (2001) depicts, through the point of view of a space station crew on a routine observation mission, a ring of junk drifting around planet Earth. The idea for this work was sparked by the appearance and rapid proliferation of virtual 3D models of all kinds of objects on the Internet. According to the artist, the ring of space debris can be seen as a self-referential representation of the download process of countless 3d models that was required to make this work. In the soundtrack, moments of silence are intercut with brief excerpts in which the astronauts from the 1969 Apollo 11 Mission to the Moon communicate with ground control.

Time Zones (2003) resulted from an invitation by the group Negativland to create a video based on one of their tracks. The artist chose *Time Zones*, one of his favourite tracks, from the group's best-known album, *Escape from Noise* (1987). He followed a principle of meticulous

synchronisation of the images with that textured sound collage, proposing an interpretation of the textual narrative with its field of allusions and semantic associations – the Cold War between the United States of America and the Soviet Union, the instrumentalisation of the media as a weapon of psychological warfare, in particular Communist fearmongering in the US, and the use of computers as a means of political and ideological control.

Place in Time (2005) tells the story of a valley over millions of years, from the geological origins of the planet to the extinction of the human species and the total and irreversible disintegration of the planet in a distant future. The valley is depicted during twenty different epochs through sequence shots that describe the same tracking movement of the camera. Miguel Soares embarks on a speculative exercise of imagination to address the radical transformation of forms of social organisation of human life in a world devastated by environmental destruction and wars. It is worth highlighting, once again, the soundtrack, meticulously constructed through a combination of the most diverse sounds.





Encounters, 2023

Animation, stereo audio, 1'30"



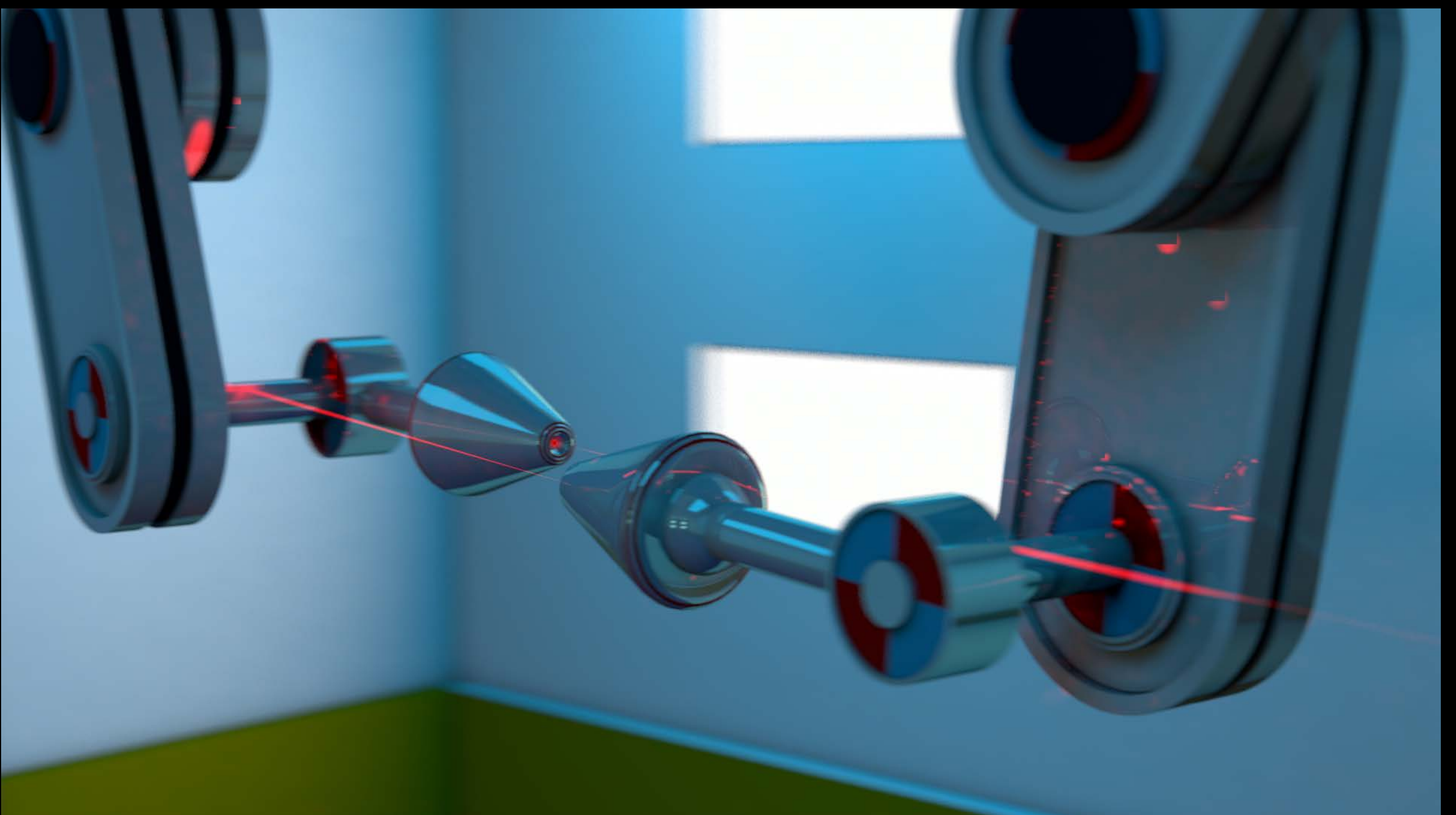
MetaTouch, 2023

Animation, stereo audio, 4'16"



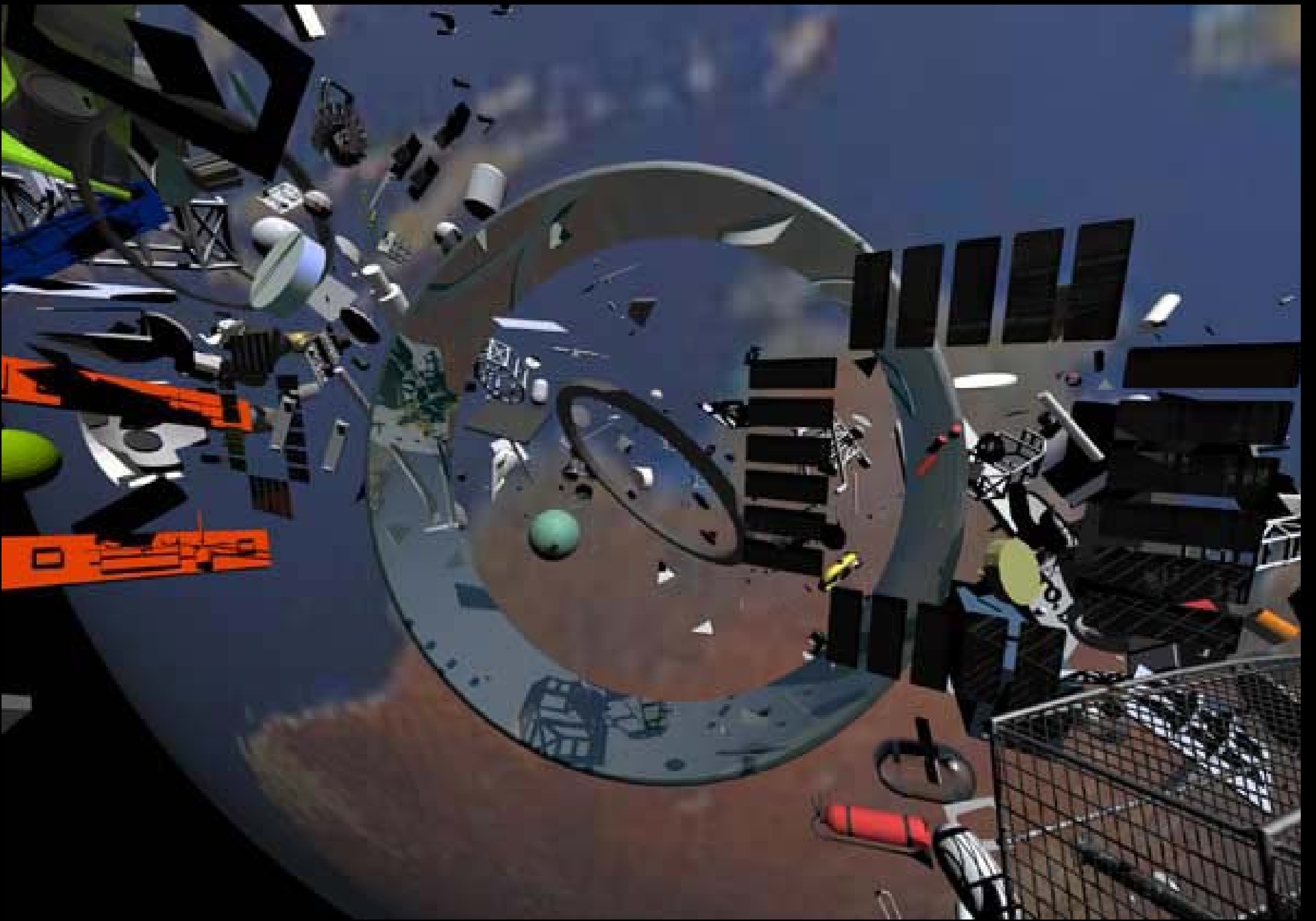
ChronoCube, 2023

Animation, stereo audio, 08'35"
Audio: Qrain II (2003)
by migso



Assembly Line, 2017-23

Animation, stereo audio, 6'08"



SpaceJunk beta 1.0, 2001

Animation, mono audio, 4'42"



Time Zones, 2003

Animation, mono audio, 5'28"
Audio: Time Zones (1987)
by Negativland



Place in Time, 2005

Animation, stereo audio,
11'30"

Rialto6

