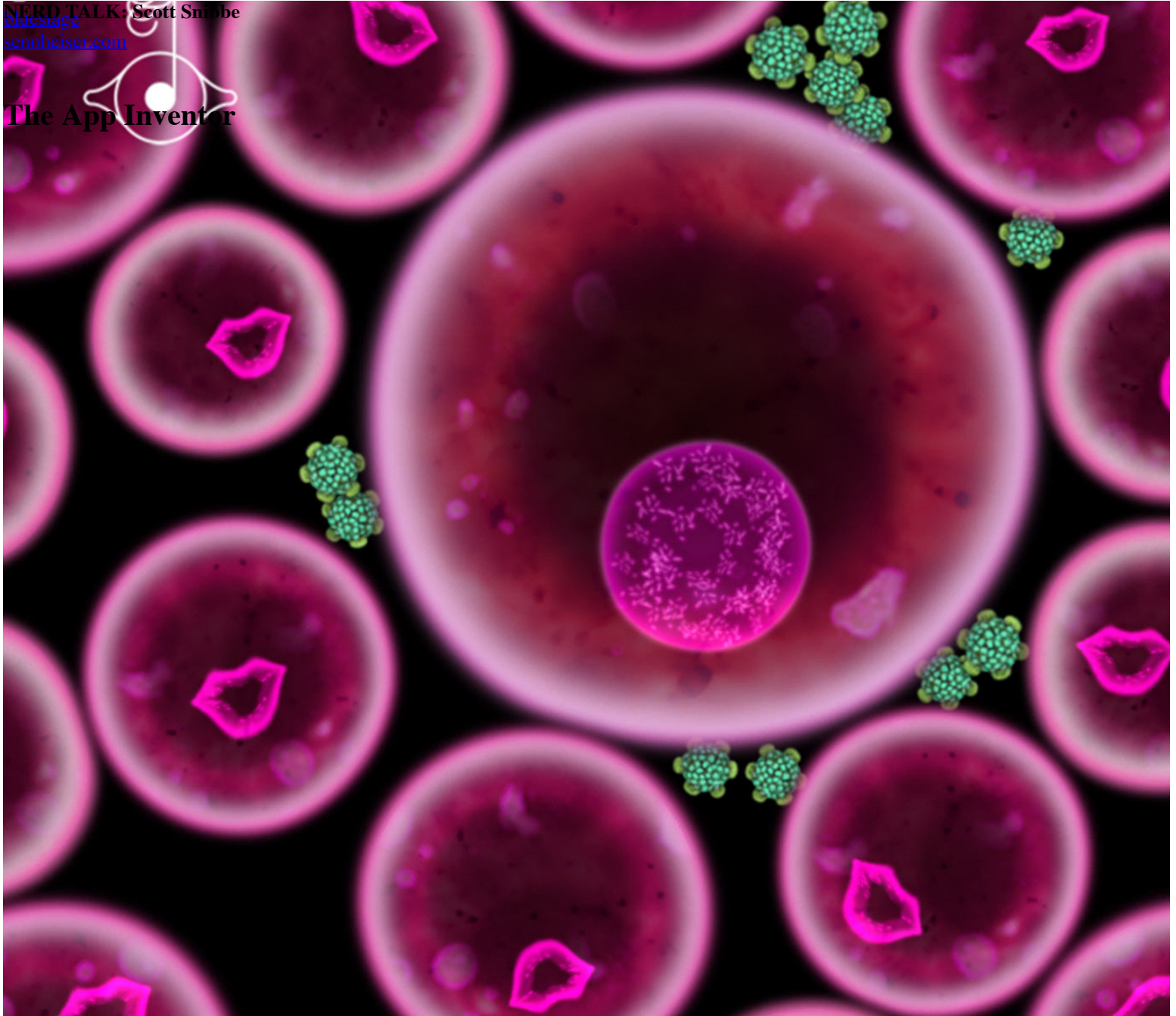


NERD TALK: Scott Snibbe
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The App Inventor



Issue: 2015[VI]

Author: Simon E. Fuchs

Photos: Biophilia-screenshots by Scott Snibbe

Video: Scott Snibbe

He's the technical mind behind the world's first app album. American Scott Snibbe is an inventor, artist and entrepreneur, and with his most recent app, he wants to reach the masses through interactive music.

Scott Snibbe is restless. He even spends his Skype interview walking through the streets of San Francisco. For the 46-year-old, borders and conventions only exist to be questioned. He describes himself as a "pioneer" in a lot of different areas, including interactive music, on his website. He's right. Last year, New York's Museum of Modern Art added Björk's app-album *Biophilia*, which he co-developed, into its permanent collection – the first app ever to be included. With his most recent invention, a music-video app, Snibbe wants to tease more creativity out of people.

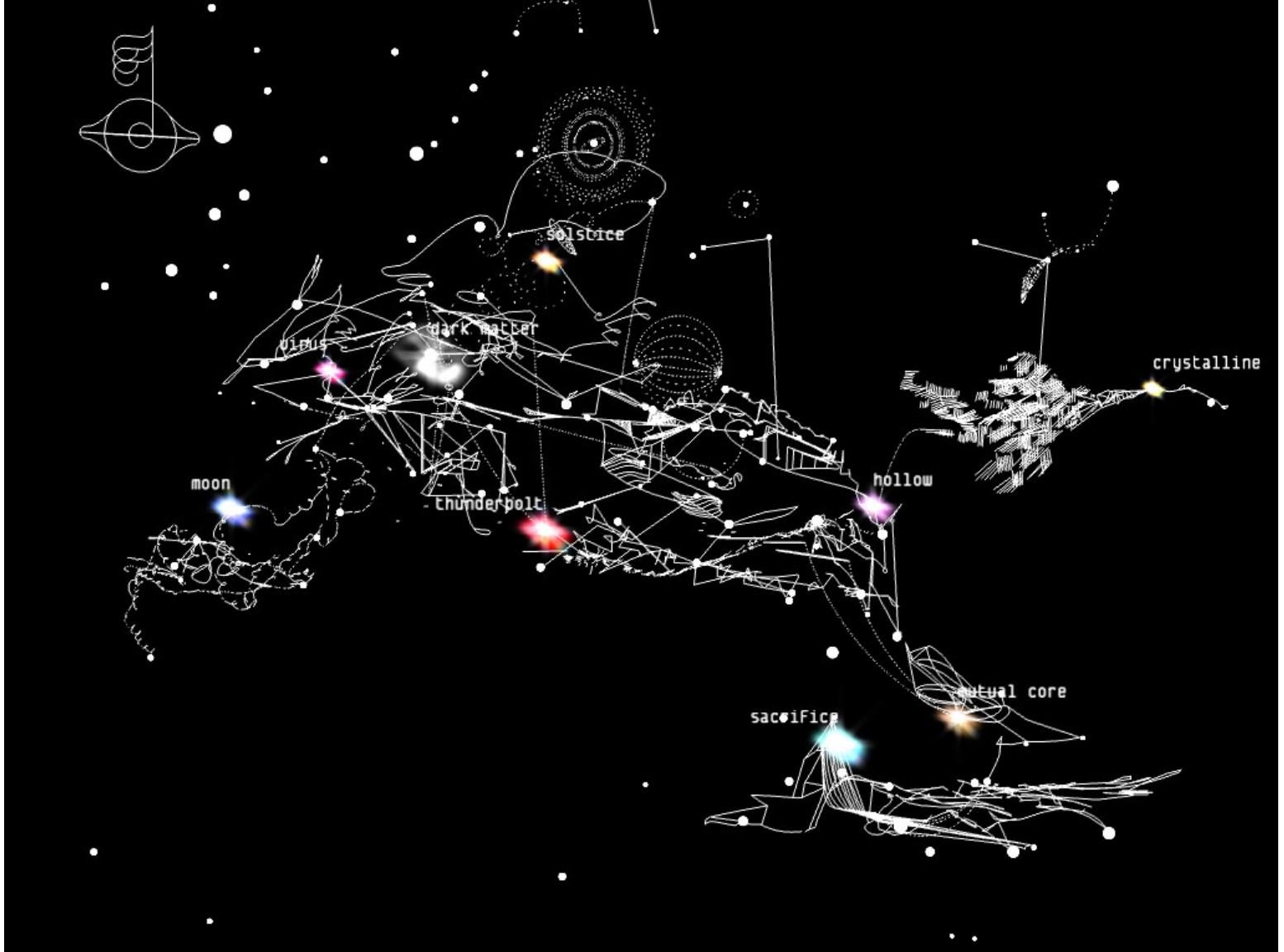
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Mr. Snibbe, when you normally walk through the streets of San Francisco, do you listen to music without interactive elements?
I listen to music constantly, purely. Without video, without visual effects or interactivity.

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In your projects, you combine music with videos, graphics and interactive elements. How does that look, exactly?

I have various approaches. One way is to visualize music. In that case, I make various structural aspects of the music visible -- for example through a film or through animation. A second approach involves visual instruments. Shapes on the screen can be touched to produce music. A third way is interactive music. This is a combination of film, video game and music, though it is no clearly defined genre. Sometimes it feels more like a game, other times more like an interactive story, or like a musical instrument. I work with all of these forms.



“Interactive music always has to tell a story. Otherwise you get lost in pure technology and visual effects.”

Scott Snibbe

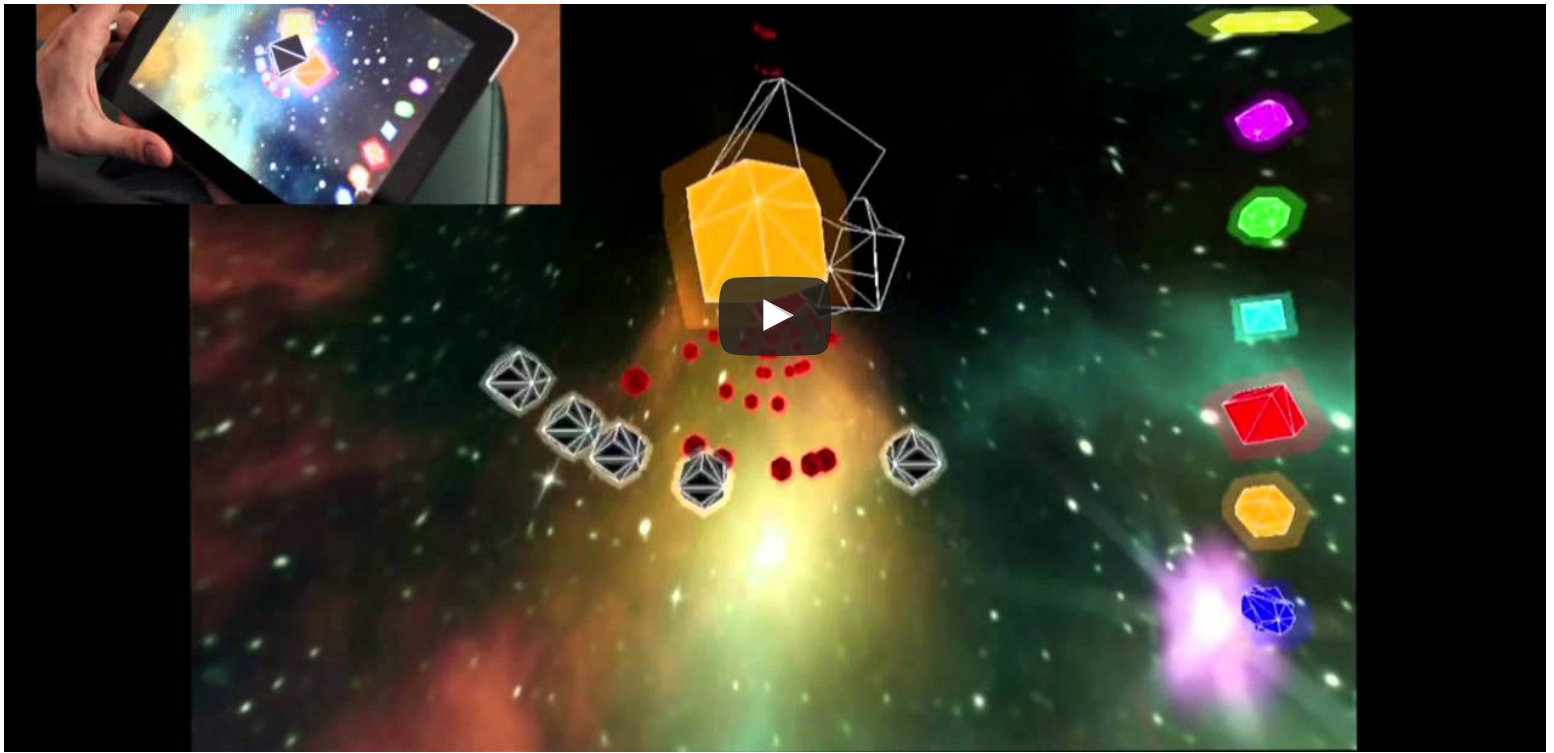
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How did you come up with the idea?

My parents were artists and had a strong affinity for technology. Their thing was plastic, that was really new back in the 1960s. In the same way that they were fascinated by plastic, I was fascinated by computers. I saw an Apple II for the first time when I was 10. For me, it was like a movie screen, except that the computer was interactive. From then on, PCs were for me the ultimate medium. I was looking for a way to bring interactive technology, music and graphics together. With apps I can combine these things wonderfully.

björk: biophilia: crystalline app tutorial





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You were responsible for the world's first app album. What were the ideas behind Björk's "Biophilia" album?

Each of the 10 songs in the app are interactive and visual in a totally individual way. We didn't impose any limits on ourselves and during the conception, we allowed ourselves to be inspired by nature. The song "crystalline" is like a game. By flying through different crystal tunnels and collecting certain crystals, you release certain parts of the song. As a result, the song can be structured in countless new ways. You can play your own instruments to the song "thunderbolt." The song was inspired by electricity and lightning. So for that reason you can create your own lightning bolts with your fingers that generate different sounds in the song, depending on their shape.

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What is it like working together with Björk?

When it came to the app album, she worked like a film director. She gave me lots of creative freedom. She started with a script, a manifesto, of how she imagined the app album. Every app version of a song describes a story of its own. With the help of YouTube links of natural phenomena, and raw versions of the songs, I sat down and got to work.





“The app album Biophilia shows Björk’s view of reality. It links music with technology and natural phenomena.”

Scott Snibbe

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Why is nature so present in the app?

With the app, we wanted to bring nature closer to people. The actual essence of nature is invisible. Most people have trouble imagining the regularity behind the shape of a leaf, for example. With the app, users can play with the raw material of nature.

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The app album was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in 2014. Did that surprise you?

I would often go to the MoMa with my parents when I was younger. The exhibition pieces there are like a canon for modern art. It is very nice to be a part of that, and to receive this recognition. And I think it's important to save the app for the future. With the app, I wanted to do pioneering work in this new medium and for interactive music.

„With Biophilia however, Björk truly innovated the way people experience music by letting them participate in performing and making the music and visuals, rather than just listening passively.“

Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator,

Department of Architecture and Design at MoMa

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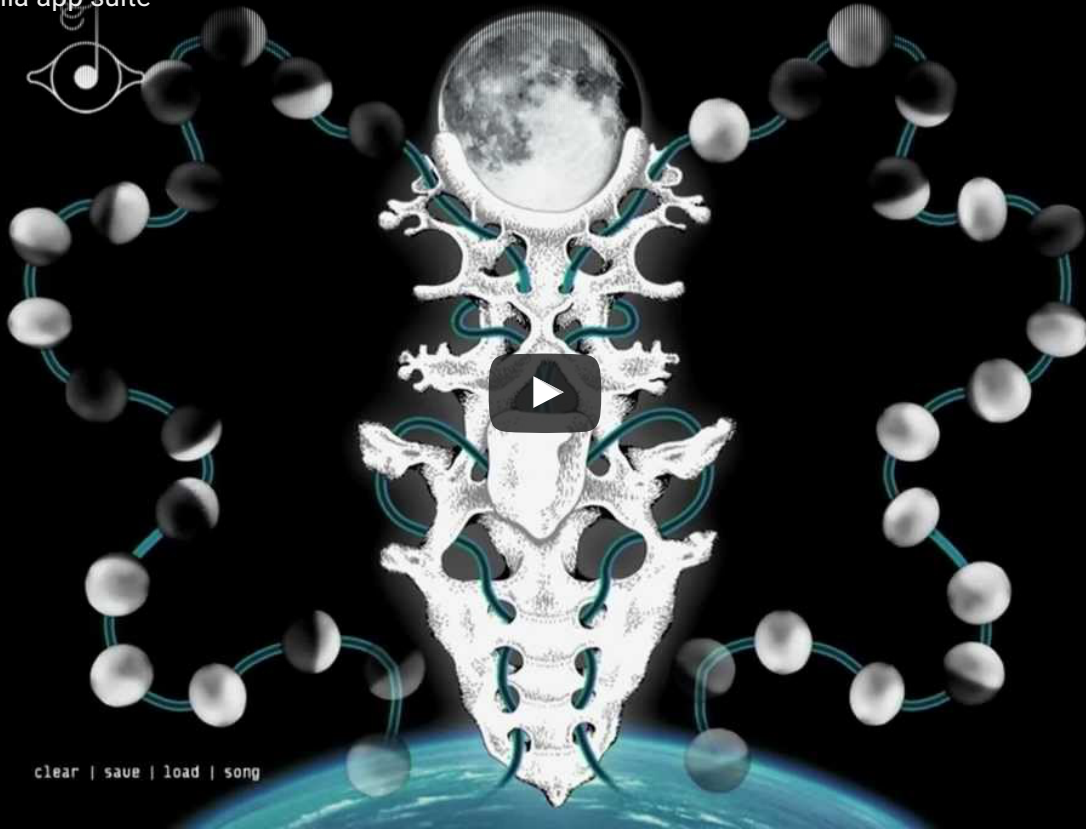
What makes interactive music that uses apps so special?

Apps are clearly the medium of our era. Users need to become active themselves, they are asked to use their imagination. Through interactive music, people get to know themselves and their abilities better, and can even reach a meditative state. I find it especially appealing to make it possible for everyone to be creative.

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How far has interactive music gotten today?

We are still pretty much at the beginning. Apps make lots of things possible. But albums like “Biophilia” by Björk, or “Rework” by Philip Glass are pioneering works. It’s almost still too early for the medium. A platform is still missing. The app store is too big, and projects like these get lost in the huge number of apps. What's missing is a kind of Instagram for interactive music. I'm currently working on creating one. The project is called "Eyegroove." With this app, users can record their own videos to existing songs. My goal is to establish "Eyegroove" as a platform for interactive music. But for that I'll definitely need another five to 10 years. The mills of the music industry grind slowly.



[Björk: Biophilia for iOS](#)

[Björk: Biophilia for Android](#)

[The app “Eyegroove” is now available for iOS devices](#)



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