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Microscopy AND Microanalysis

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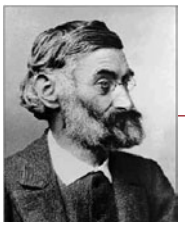

Dear Abbe

Dear Abbe,
We are having a bizarre scanning problem. Straight vertical lines in an object become slightly zigzagged with a period of up to 6-7 scan lines, and there also may be some oscillation in the intensity. Apparently it doesn't seem to be the scanner controller or the galvo mechanism. It does not seem to be the electric power in the building nor is it a mechanical vibration. It is not a computer or cables. It is not a 60 Hz noise. We've sent the instrument off to the manufacturer, but it doesn't have a problem at their facility. We suspect that we have a poltergeist. Can you help us?
Mike in Kent

Dear Ghost Hunter,
Most central labs are inhabited by specters, ghouls and Wissenschaftgeists. Sometimes these take the form of ethereal vapors, much as you describe. Other times they are simply senior administrators or former mistresses who wait for you in the parking lot with cans of pepper spray. In dealing with all things paranormal, I often call on my dear friend Madame Dikroic. She's no Brandy Green, but she has more experience in appeasing apparitions than the Detroit Lions have at losing games. Modern instruments have extra space where the engineers couldn't cram another wire and this is where these mischievous spirits reside. The possessed equipment will behave in unusual ways—not working at inopportune moments, deleting large amounts of data, or emitting a high-pitched whining noise that sounds eerily like Abba. One solution is to mix jimson weed with sulfur and honey. The mixture is placed in a small bowl made of Snake Wood, which has been rubbed against a black cat, and then the mixture is slowly sipped. If mixed with about 500 cc of Schönauer Apfel Schnapps, you will no longer notice the aberrant scan lines or hear "Dancing Queen" in your head.

Having trouble sleeping at night worrying about technique? Can't seem to find the right words to say to your technicians? Let Abbe have a whack at it. What could go wrong? Send your posers to his assistant at jshields@cb.uga.edu.

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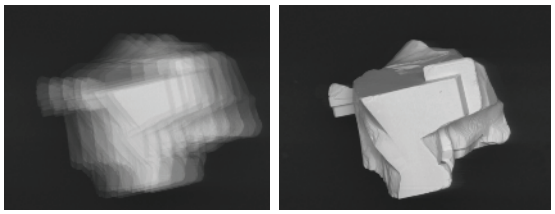

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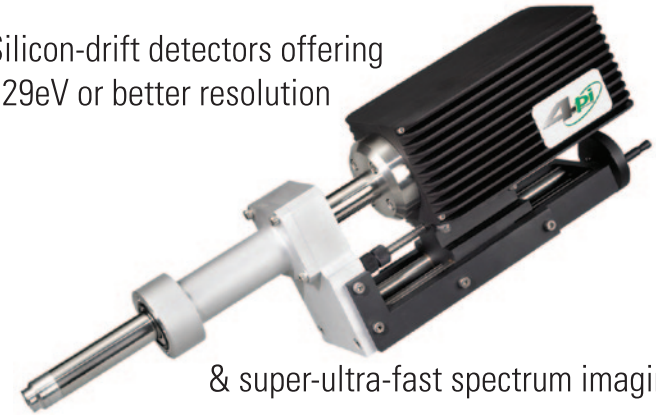

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