



Issue 1 Stardust

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Links for this issue and other
inspirations can be found at:
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First printing

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years ago I started a project to get better at telling stories. My original goal was to make a short, fictional film every week. That was

unrealistic — at least for me. What I learned right away was that if I was going to get a lot of practice, I had to improvise. So I started shooting everything around me and telling stories about what was happening in my life. I found a little group of people also doing this. We practiced and figured things out together. We invented vlogging and it became a whole thing. And it worked for me! I made a couple of hundred little films over a few years and I got a whole lot better at telling stories.

Then, for a decade or so, making any kind of art faded away. This coincided with my beginning to work at Mozilla. The part of my brain that designs software has a large overlap with the part that makes art. At the end of the day, I was out of creative energy. That was part of it

for sure. Also, I guess, my priorities had shifted.

But since my father died in 2021, I've had this compulsion to make art again — zines in particular. So to reclaim some of that energy, I changed my sleep schedule and began working on art early in the morning. That's been a big help. I created my zine Grey Matter Gravy and published four issues over the last two years. But now I find I want more practice. Grey Matter Gravy issues (and another zine I'm cooking up) are becoming bigger and more involved. I need something smaller. Something I can do more often. Something like telling stories about what's happening in my life.

And that's how my email newsletter that was only supposed to say, "Hey I made something" became one of the things I make. I hope you enjoy it and I would love to hear your thoughts about it either way. 



I really shot everything - 2004

Stardust

I've been working on a special issue of Grey Matter Gravy for more than a year now. It's about my parents, grief, living forever, and trips to the moon in an egg-shaped spaceship. There are also some song lyrics in there, including this bit from "Stardust."

Though I dream in vain
In my heart it will remain
My stardust melody
The memory of love's refrain

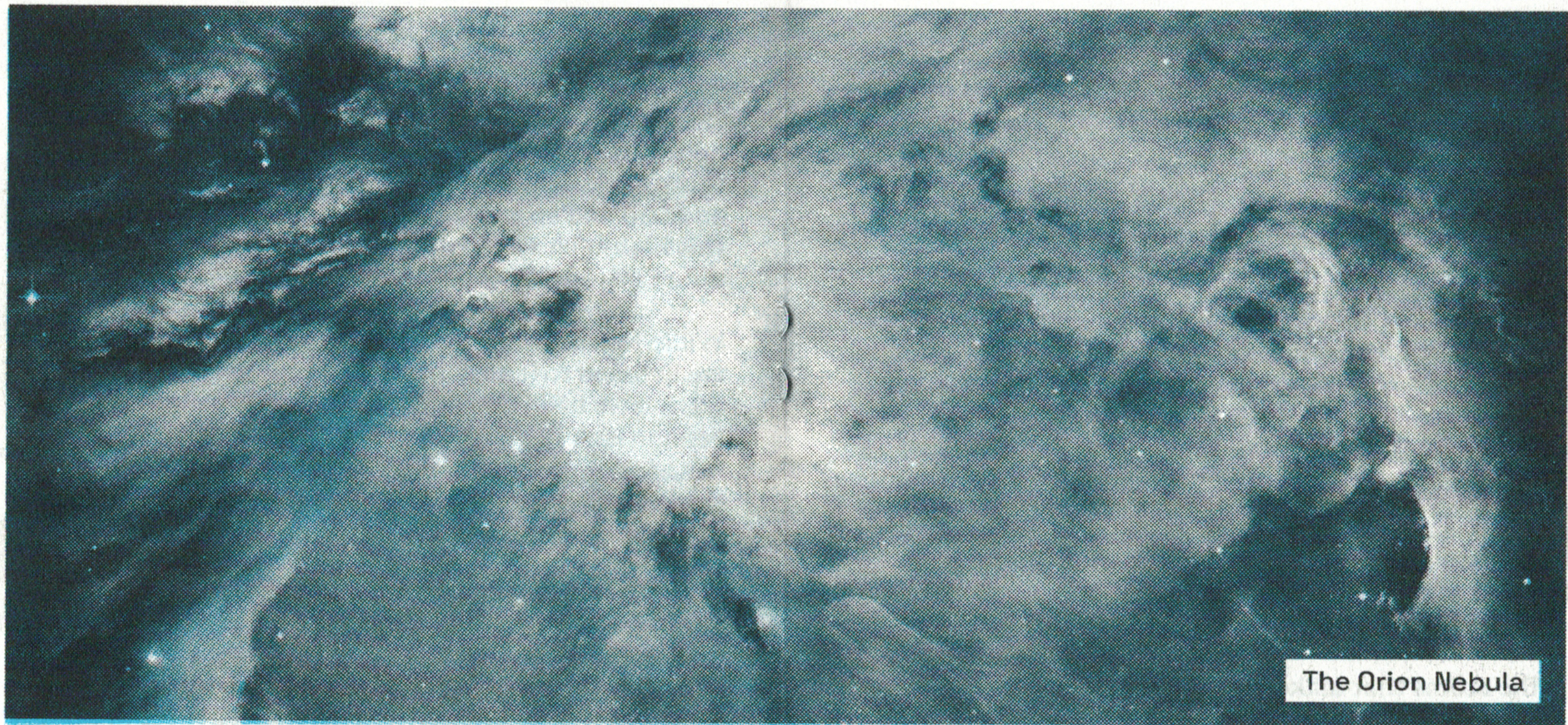
Sometime around the beginning of May 1978, my grandfather died. My dad, who was living in Texas, came up to New Jersey to take care of the funeral and settle his affairs. Afterward, he showed up at our house in Grandpa's Ford Granada to drive my brother and me to Texas for the summer. We'd only seen him once (briefly) since my parents split up and we'd moved

back to New Jersey four years earlier. Four years is a long time for a kid.

These were some of my first experiences of him as a person in the world. I remember two main things from that summer. We saw nearly every movie that came out and Dad had an expansive record collection. He even had this high-tech stereo made of separate components. We didn't have a stereo at home—just an AM radio in the car.

Willie Nelson's album, *Stardust*, had just come out and we listened to it all summer. That record and its title track have been one of my favorites ever since. Willie's version isn't the only great one. This song is so good—it has a lot of great versions. The longing that never ends; the beautiful melody; it perfectly conjures that ache in your chest that can stop you in your tracks.

So I've been working on this issue of Grey Matter Gravy and, as usual, I'm listening to music as I write. For the last couple of months, it's been Weyes Blood on repeat. I'm obsessed. It's almost all I've listened to. After watching a couple of music videos, YouTube started recommending



The Orion Nebula

everything it could find with Natalie Mering (aka Weyes Blood) in it including one from the Pitchfork series, "The Song I Wish I Wrote." So what's the song she wishes she wrote? Stardust.


I think being a song about a song is... That's meta, but what else is also meta is how stardust, we're all created from stardust, and to think that love would fade away into stardust and kind of evaporate and float up into the sky, to me is like we are a song, as humans, about a song, which is the universe.

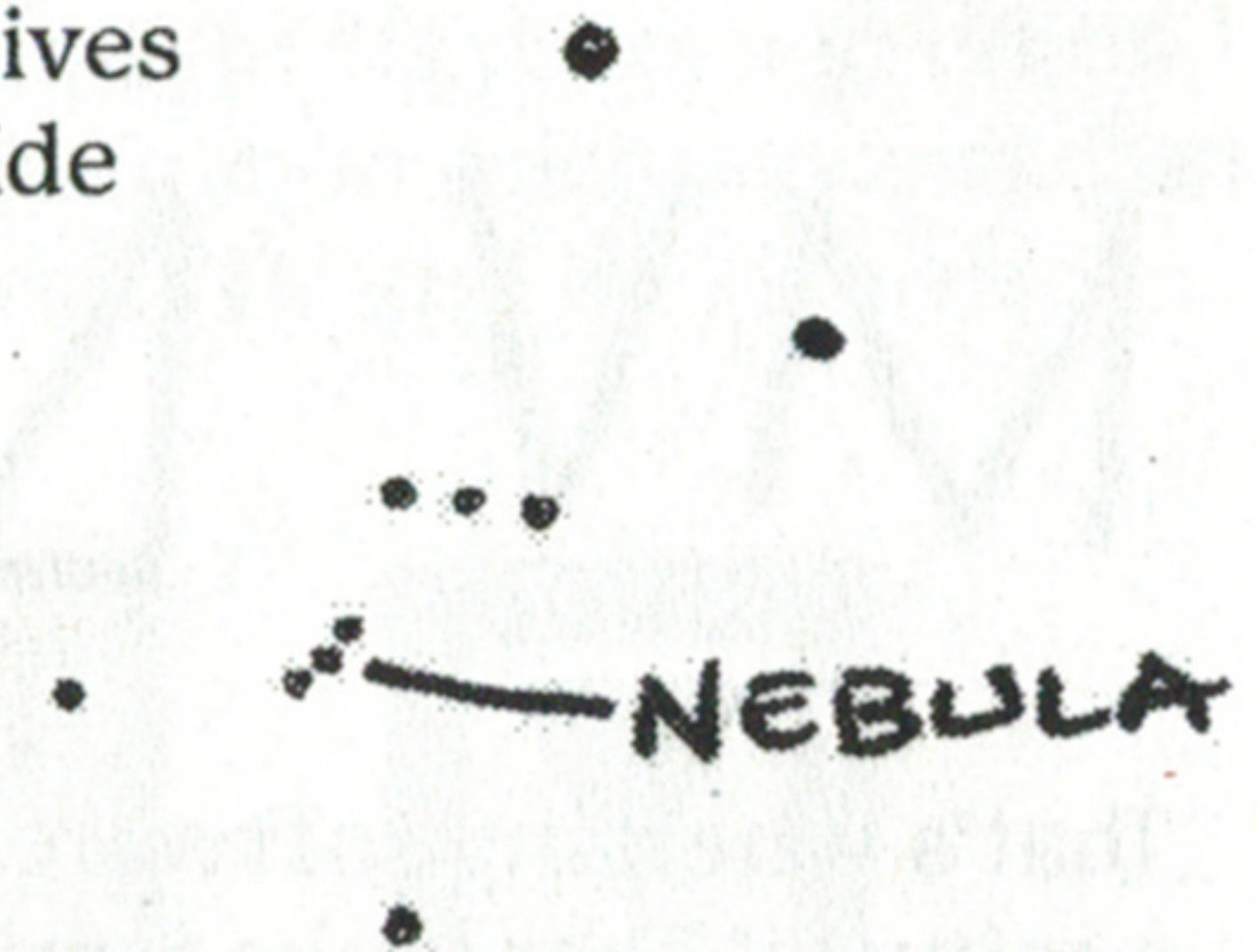
In the opening of the Cosmos series, Carl Sagan said, "The cosmos is also within us. We're made of star stuff*. We are a way for the cosmos to know itself." The connection to this song hadn't ever occurred to me. Another reason to love it.

*The atoms that make us up were created inside stars and then spread out into the cosmos by supernova explosions.

The cover of Willie Nelson's Stardust album is a painting of the Pleiades star cluster. Scientists used to think these were new stars surrounded by gas and dust left over from their formation. It turns out the stars and the gas and dust are unrelated.

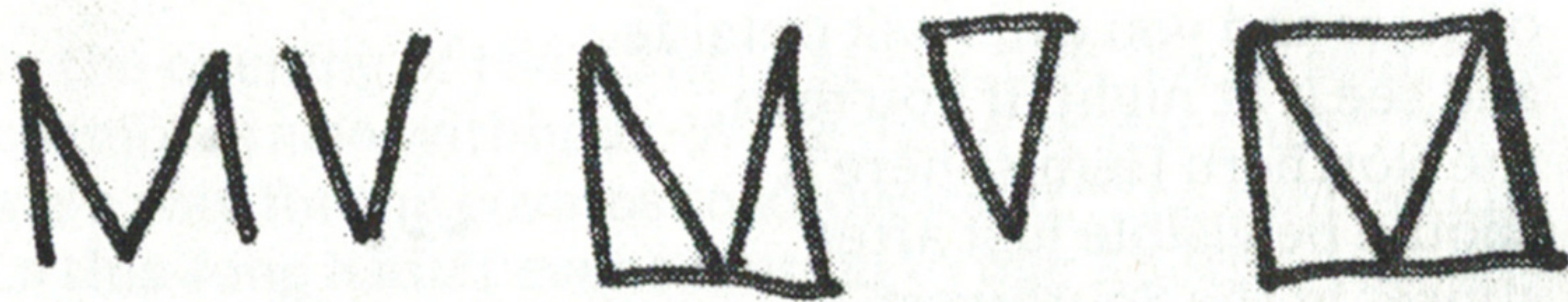
The Orion Nebula, on the other hand, sits on the edge of a massive dust ring 330 light-years across. That ring is thought to have been formed by multiple supernova explosions. Later supernova near Orion compressed the gas and dust and triggered the star formation happening there.

It's a beautiful example of the lives of stars and you can walk outside and see it at night. If you're in the Northern Hemisphere it should be visible just after sunset in the Southwest until mid-April. The nebula is the middle "star" in Orion's sword. 

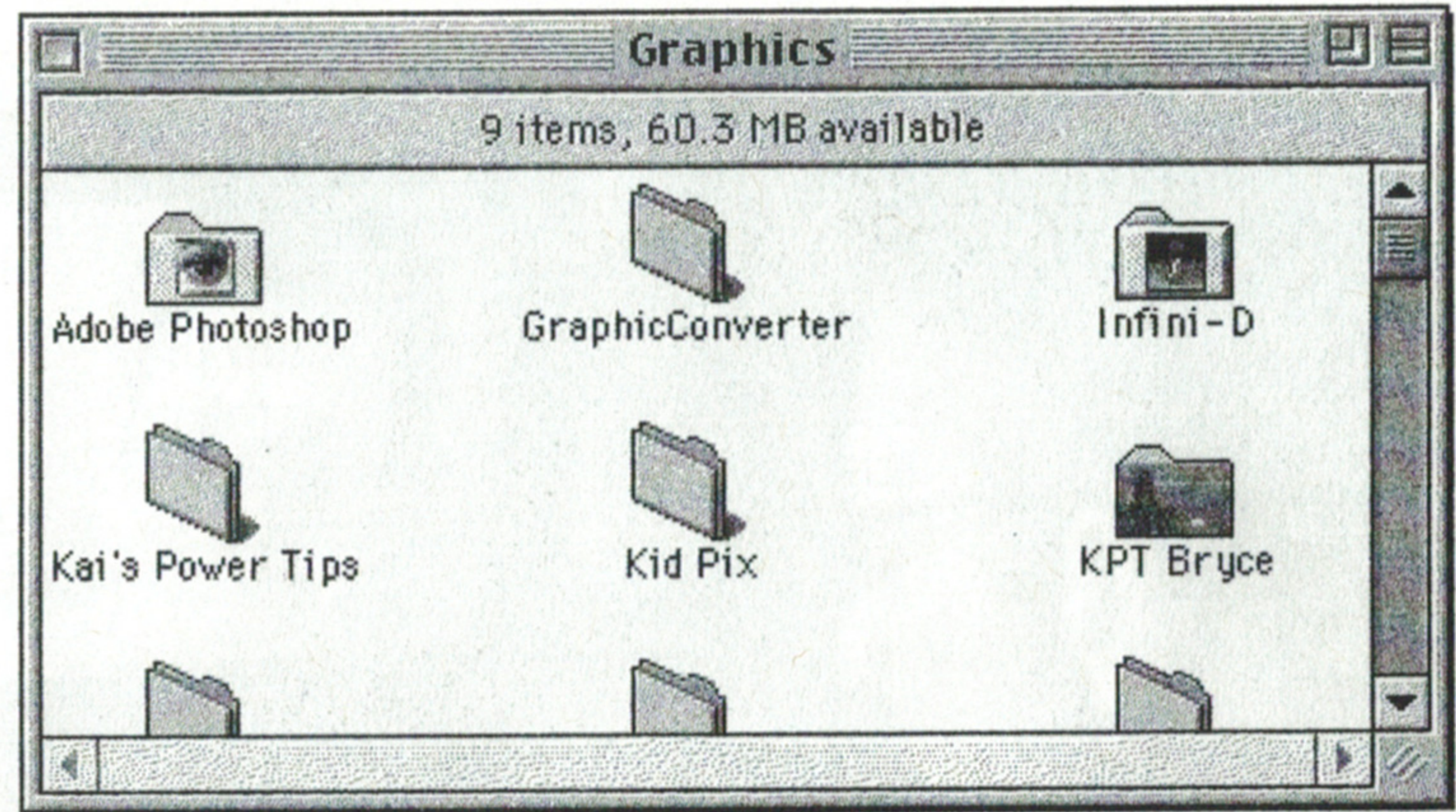




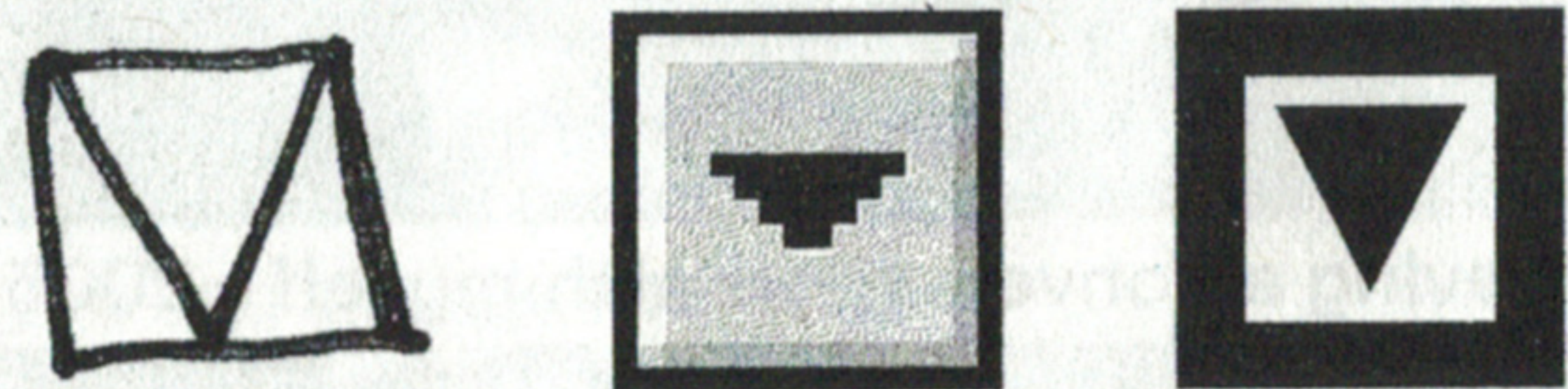
My initials are MV. When I write them, I connect them like a little sawtooth sound wave. Once you start thinking of them as lines instead of letters, it's easy to see that an M has a V in the middle of it. If you turn them into shapes, V becomes a triangle by closing off the top. Close off the bottom of an M and you've got a valley between two mountains. And if you superimpose them — put the V back inside the M, you now have a triangle inside of a square.



That's when my software designer brain goes, "Oh wait a minute! That looks familiar. It's a scroll widget (from back when we had scrollbars)."



That was roughly my train of thought 10 years ago when I came up with that. I've been using it on michaelverdi.com ever since. And now (inspired by MTV and ♀) it's also the name of this zine.





Having a conversation with myself - 2005

I Quit

Earlier I mentioned some things I'm doing and the new things I'm doing in addition to the things I was already doing. It's a lot of things. Occasionally I like to remind myself that I can quit.

Recently I quit reading a book that I wasn't into. I stopped watching a TV show after the second episode. Sometimes I quit movies 10 minutes in. I quit Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, GoodReads, and Strava. I do, though, always reserve the right to start things again if I want. I remember being done with designing things for print. Now here I am.

The point is, you can't control everything but you have more control than you sometimes realize. There are a lot of places where you make the rules and if you don't like them, you can change them. 

