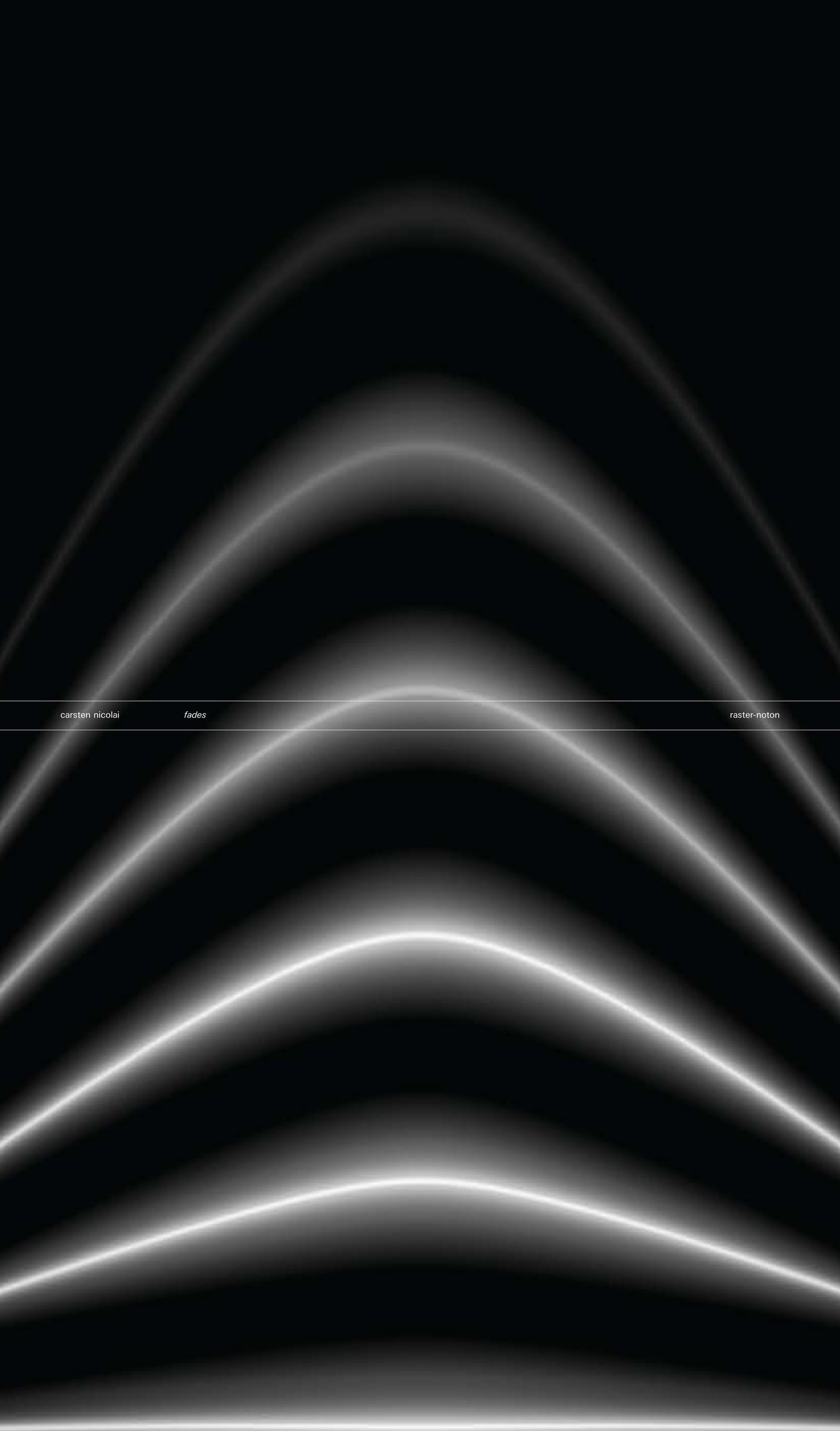
carsten nicolai
fades
raster-noton

carsten nicolai

fades

inside the black box

a black box is a space or device in which inner functionality and mechanisms are kept in the dark. the only concern lies in the result of the process between input and output. bruno latour quotes that »when a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become«*. this can be interpreted in a more philosophical and cultural sense, where accordingly, a process, no matter what content it may convey, lacks further reflection, promotes indifference, and thereby supports ignorance towards its purpose and impact.

in contrast, a work of art establishes manifold new perspectives on processes, events, and apparent facts that are normally hidden under the surface of everyday experience. by focussing on incidental details of society, the senses of the audience can be sharpened towards particular circumstances. it is thus enabled to look inside the black box of our cultural circumstances.

the work *fades* by carsten nicolai complies to this strategy. it allows a glance into the black box as it takes place inside of one. the attention of the audience is focused on the inner process of the black box rather than its outcome. the consequence is far-reaching on many levels—the results are both perceptive and conceptive in character.

entering the room, we first seem to be surrounded by darkness. the only thing perceivable is a surrounding, high hissing white noise sound that in- and decreases while also changing from side to side of the room. as soon as our eyes get used to the light conditions, we slowly become aware of the space that is filled with a soft haze of mist. congruent to the sound, a gradually varying projection of light is permeating through the room. the rays of light from the projection form continually fading shapes that constantly change their flow through the haze, thus building up a permanently changing light architecture. we are invited to walk through the room and explore the shapes and structures emanating from the light source.

in *fades*, light and sound are used as source material to establish both a spatial and semiotic vocabulary. one can witness a projection whose content seems cryptic yet suggesting substantial meaning. the light gradients of the projection, derived from mathematical processes based on linear and logarithmic wave modulations,

indicate a significance that can possibly initiate emphatic understanding. although it cannot be interpreted in pure semantics, it can provoke recognition as a meaningful visual language.

rené descartes proclaimed that the world and its fundamental principles are based on the universal language of mathematics. in this context, *fades* may represent a visual template of what this could mean. by using the language of mathematics, the fading in and out of the light shapes refers to a certain grammar yet remaining conceptually abstract. an intellectual gap opens up, creating space for interpretation and exploration and thus abandoning the fixations of our cultural heritage.

the perceptual effects that result from the light play of *fades* furthermore culminate in a fictitious spatial solidity that is diffused in constant flux. the temporal dimension of the installation exposes us to a situation, in which we constantly have to reassure our position; we are immersed in a floating space—continuously forced to adjust our coordinates.

additionally, we are able to explore our perception of space by wandering through the installation and examining how the fading light builds columns, canyons and textures we can easily destroy and reconstruct by simply screening or releasing the ray of light—the architecture loses its weight. this experience reveals how easily visual structures can be undermined and unsettled.

we leave the installation, stimulated by a vague sense that we have been exposed to a profound sensation. instead of indifferently follow the outcome of a productive process from the outside we have had a look at the conditions of a process inside of a black box. as a consequence, we might be able to discover what may lead our experience to a higher consciousness of the world around.

daniel klemm

* see latour, bruno: pandora's hope: *essays on the reality of science studies*; cambridge/ma, usa 1999

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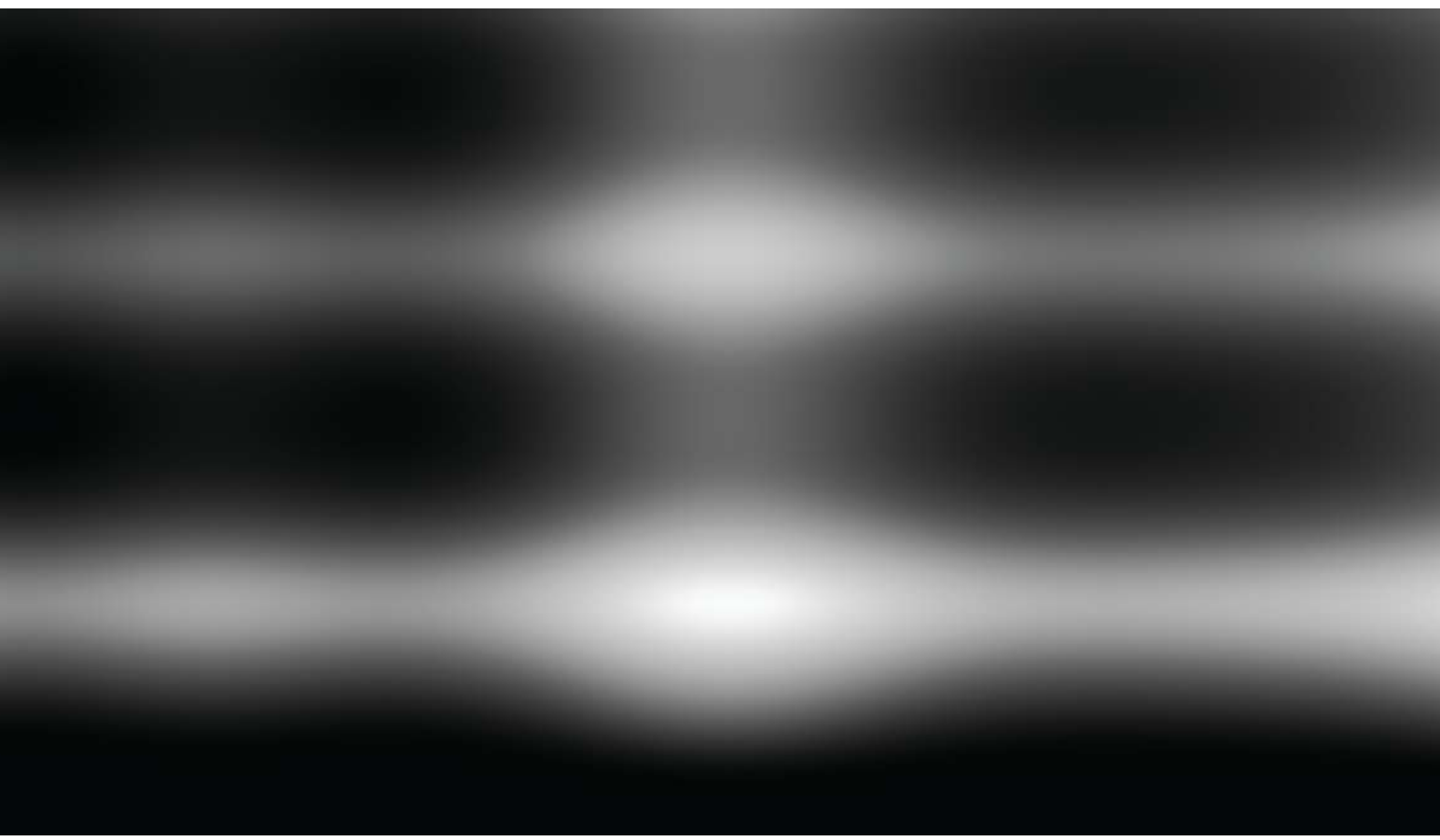

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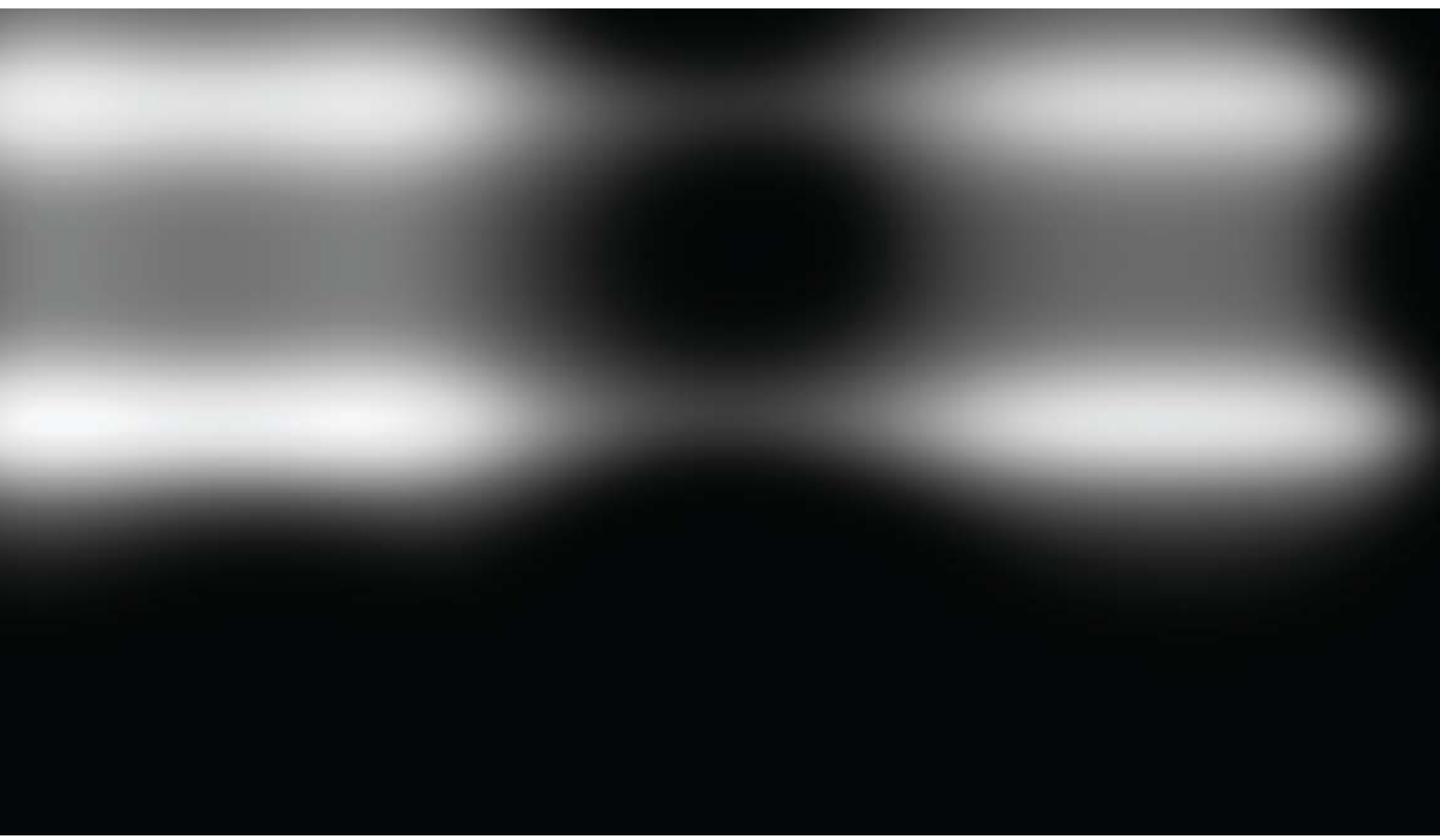

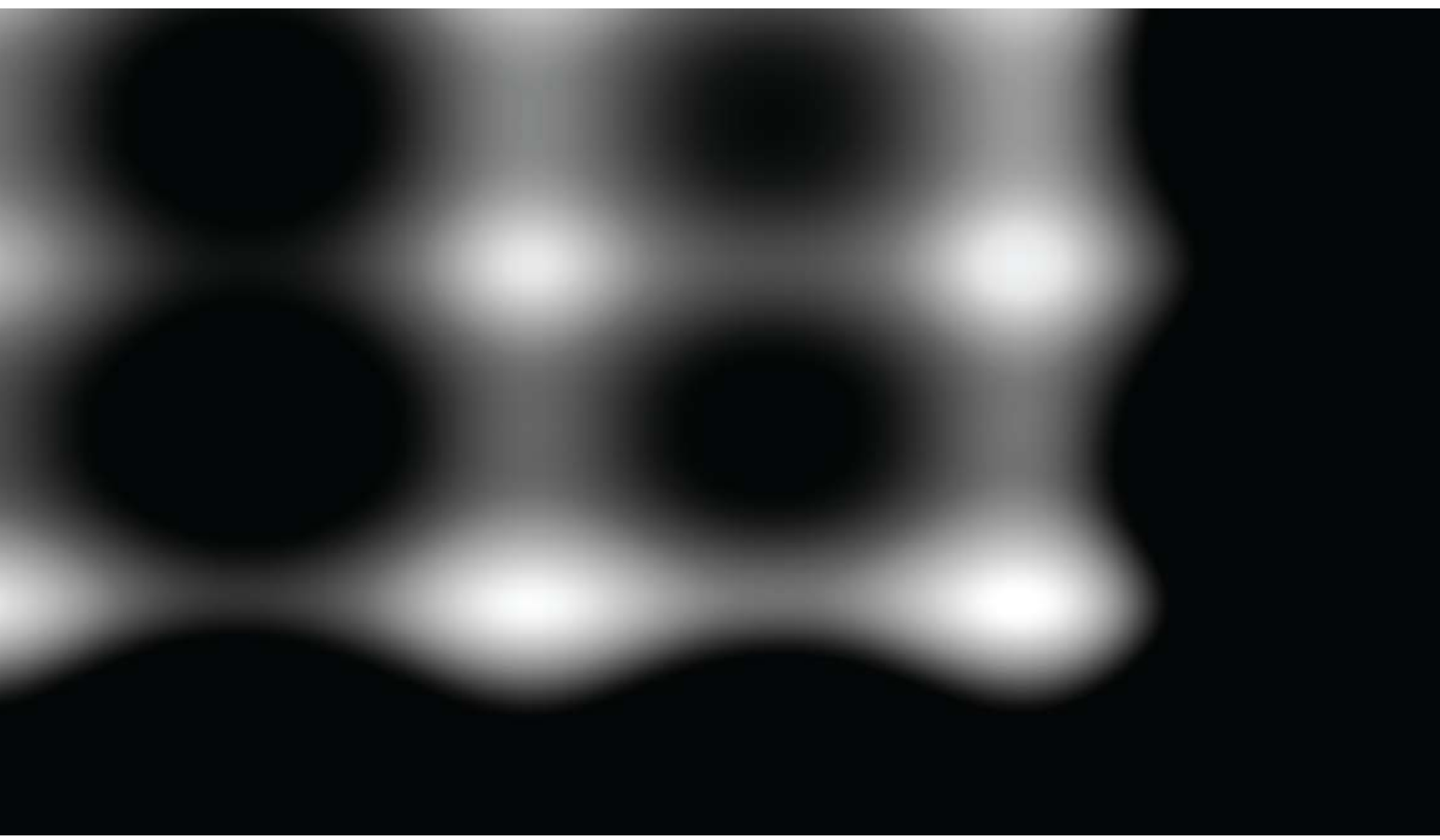

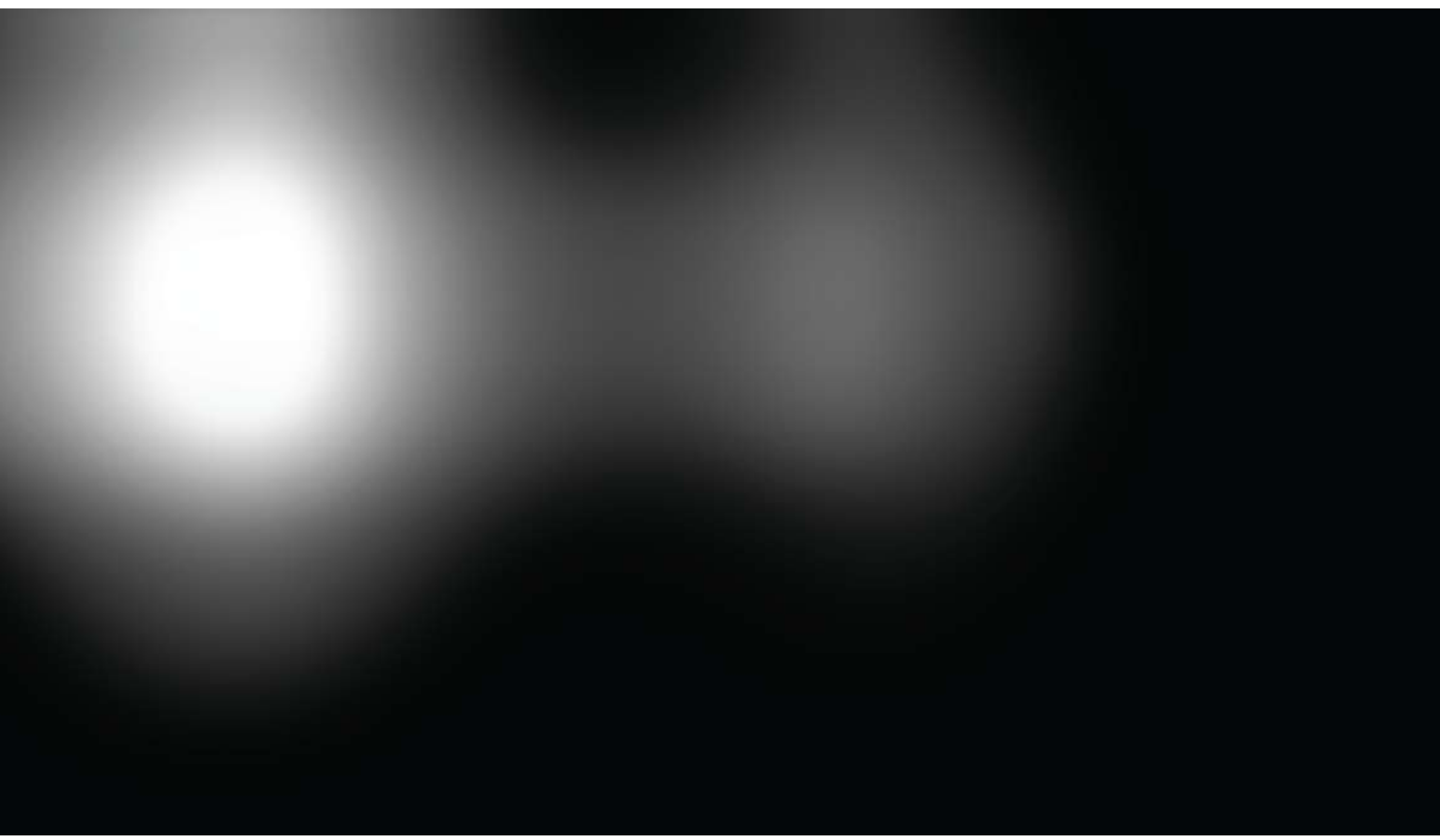

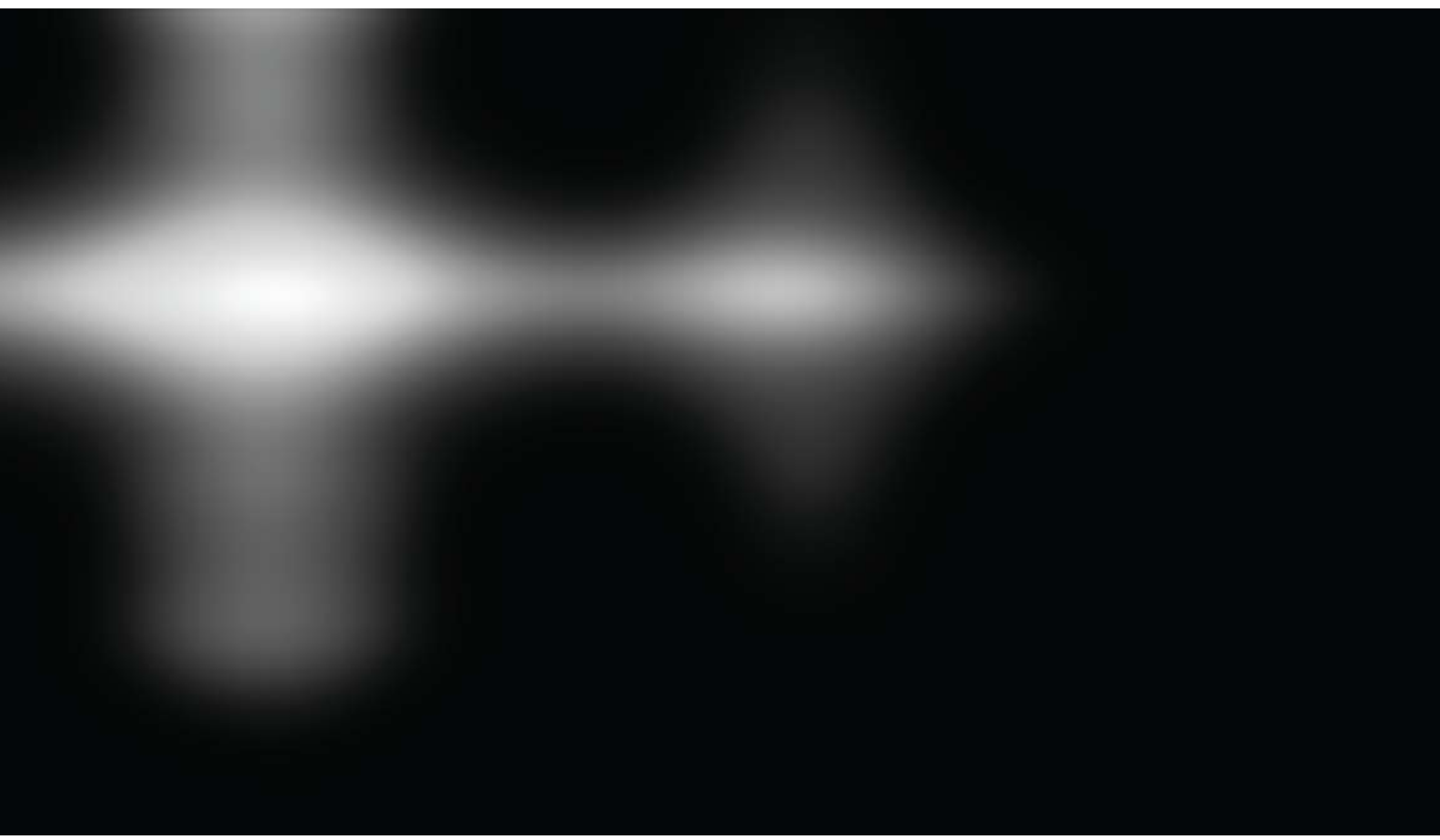

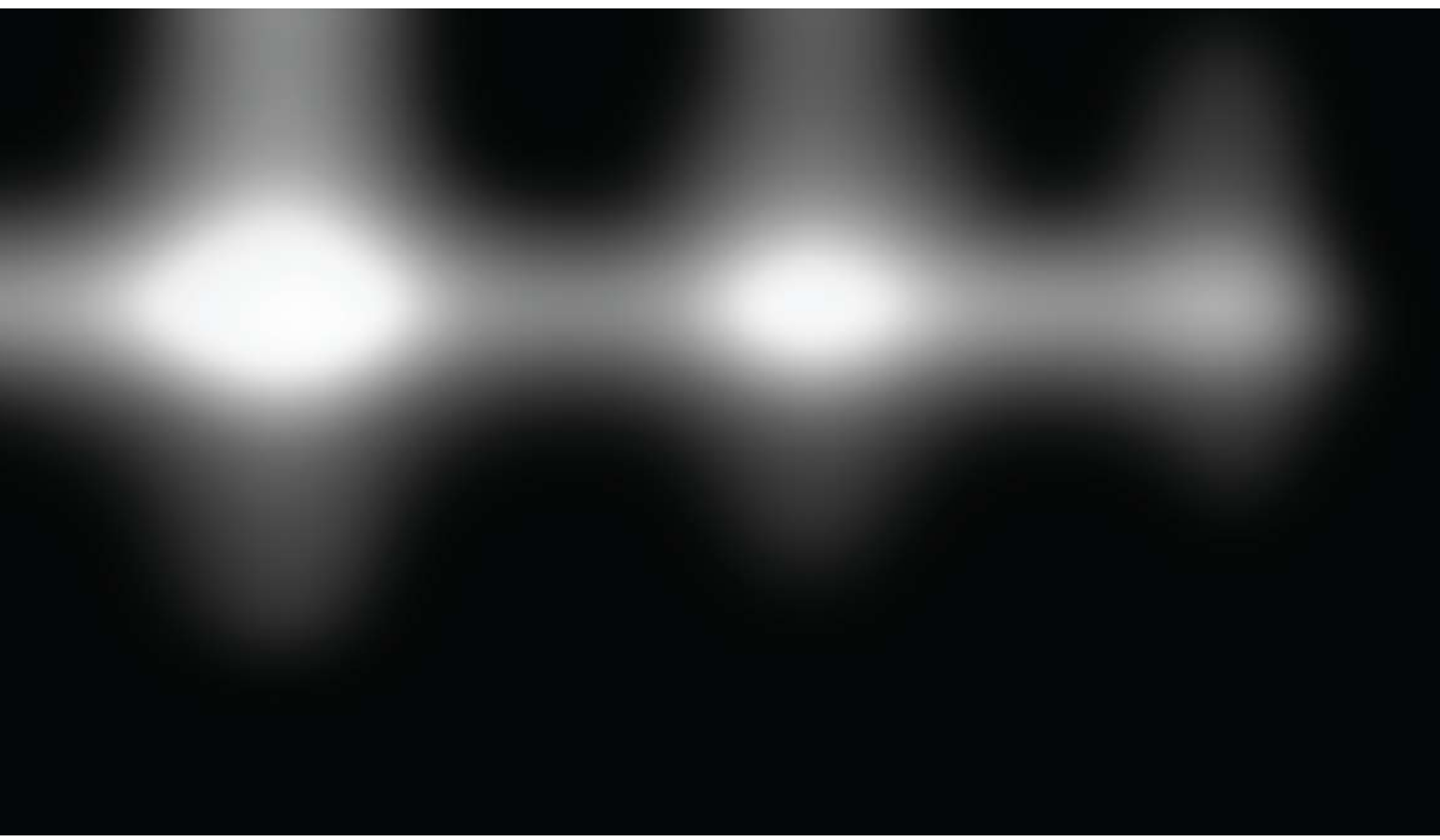

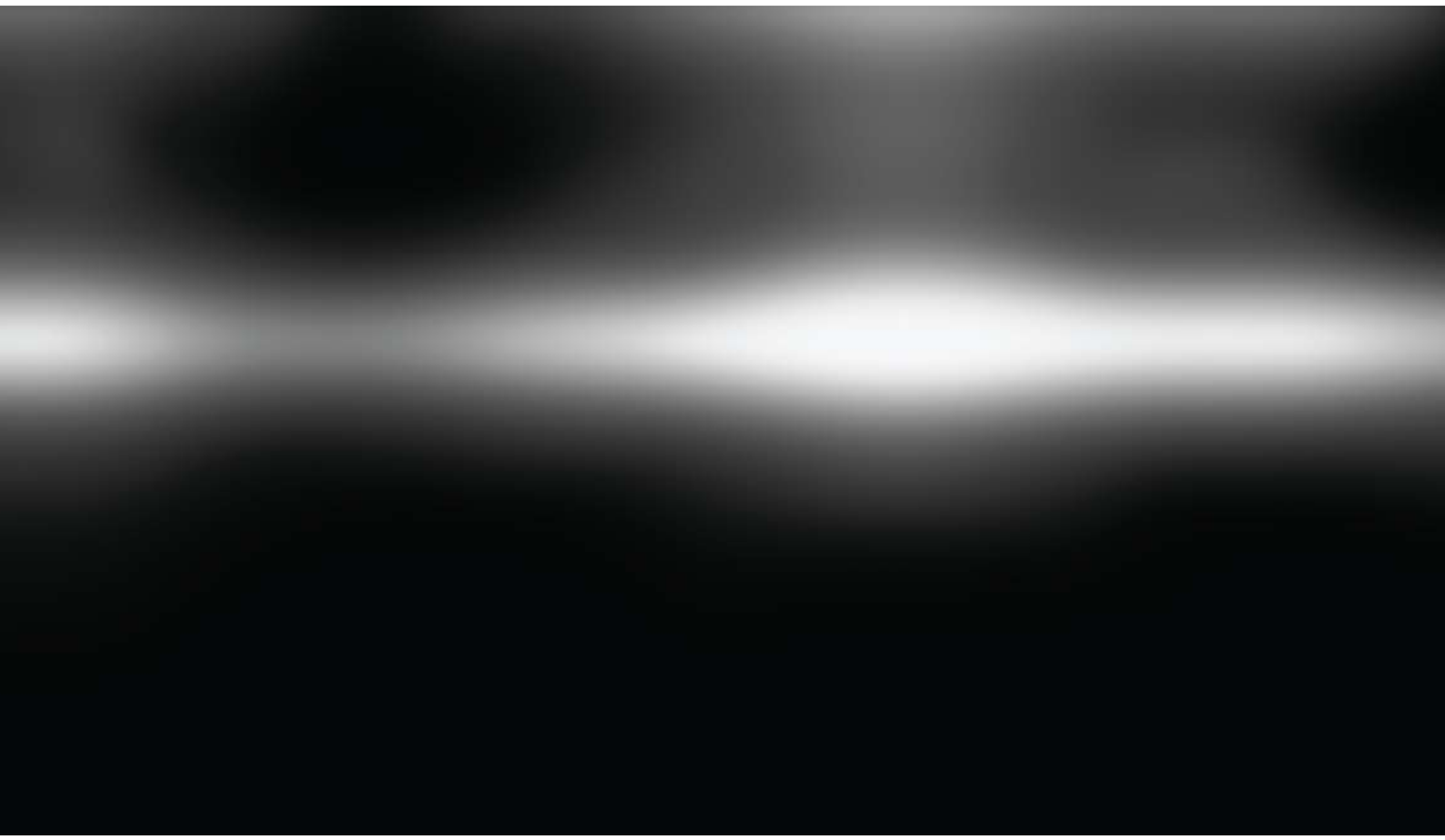

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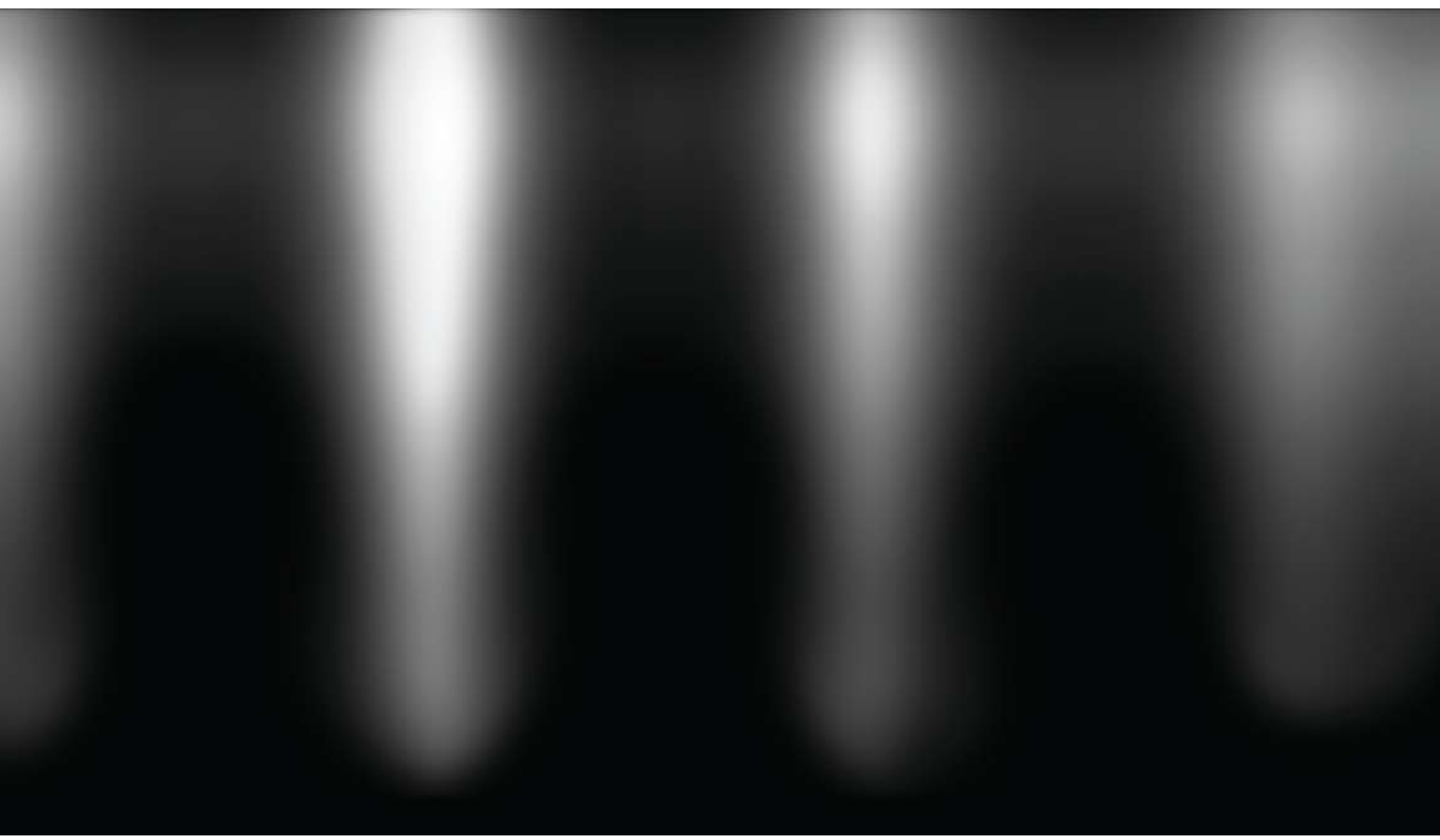

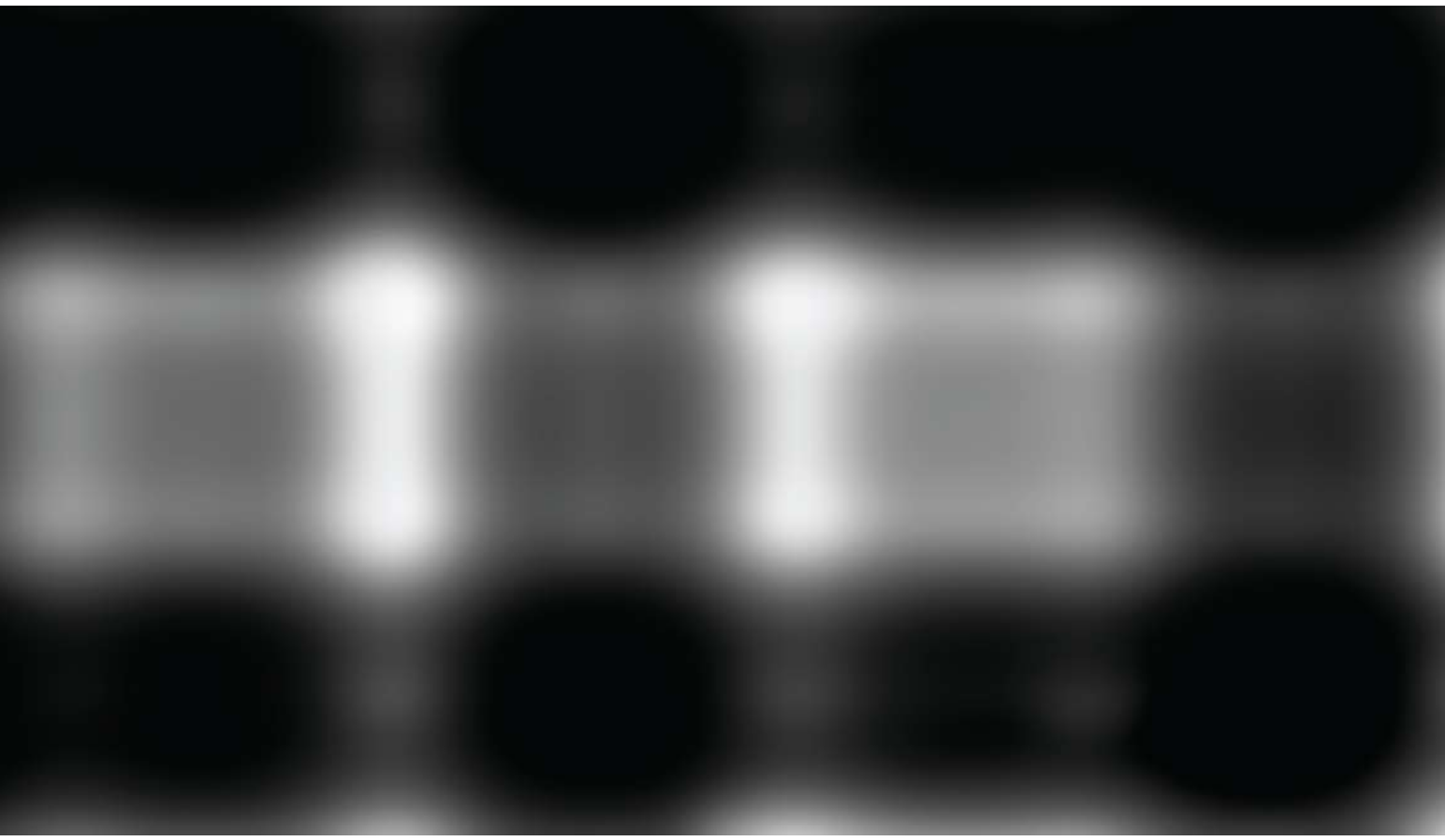

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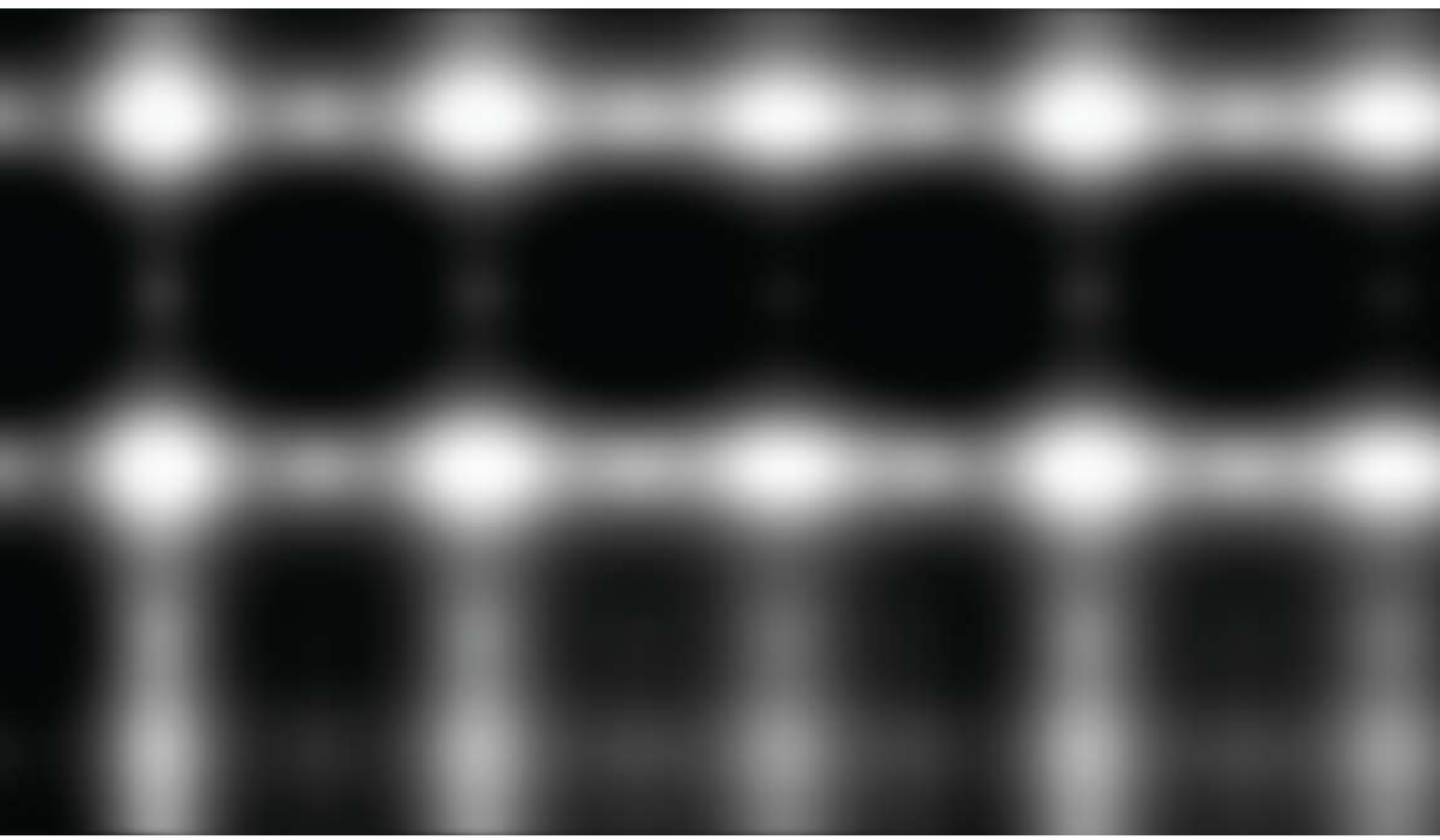

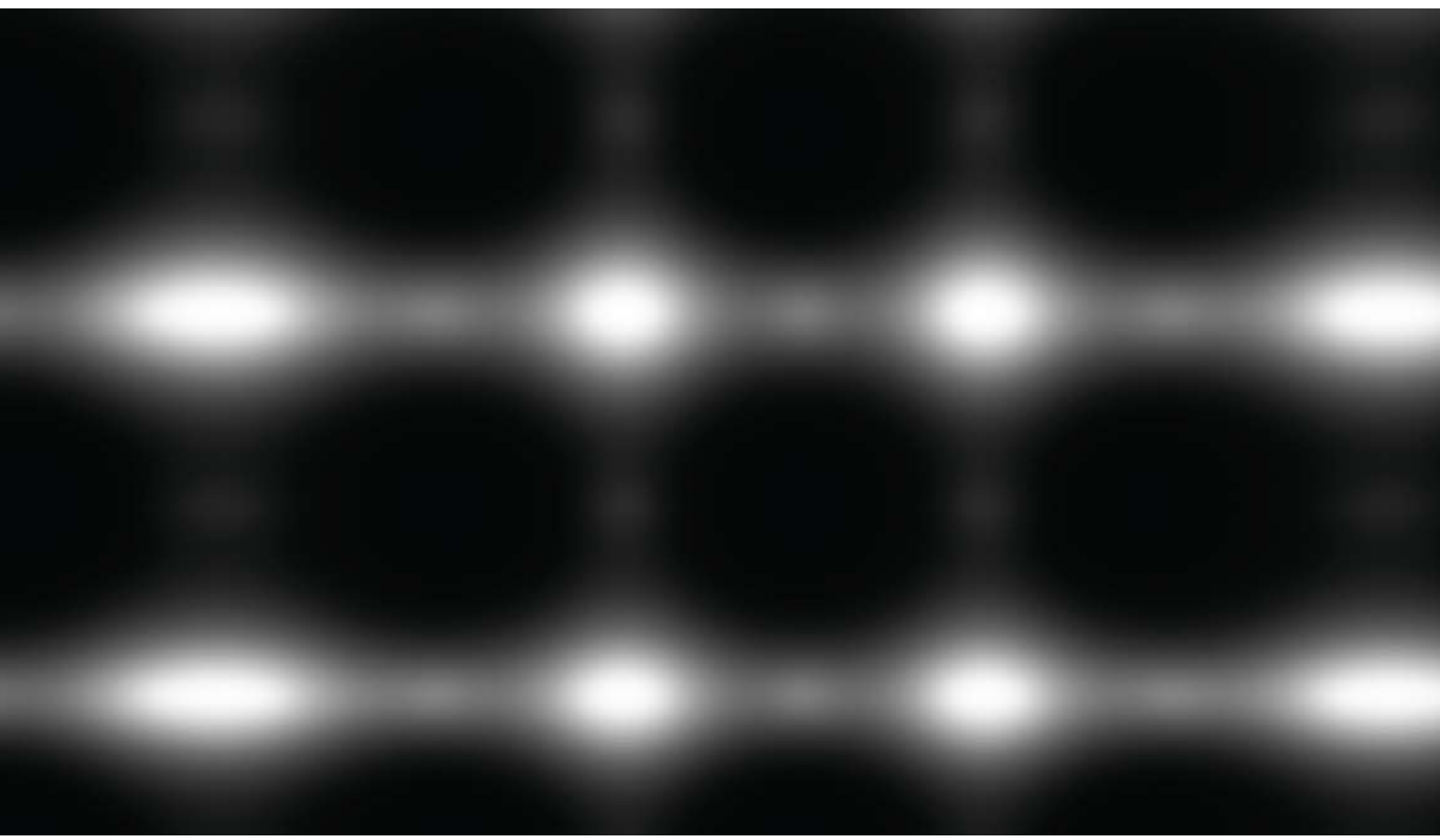

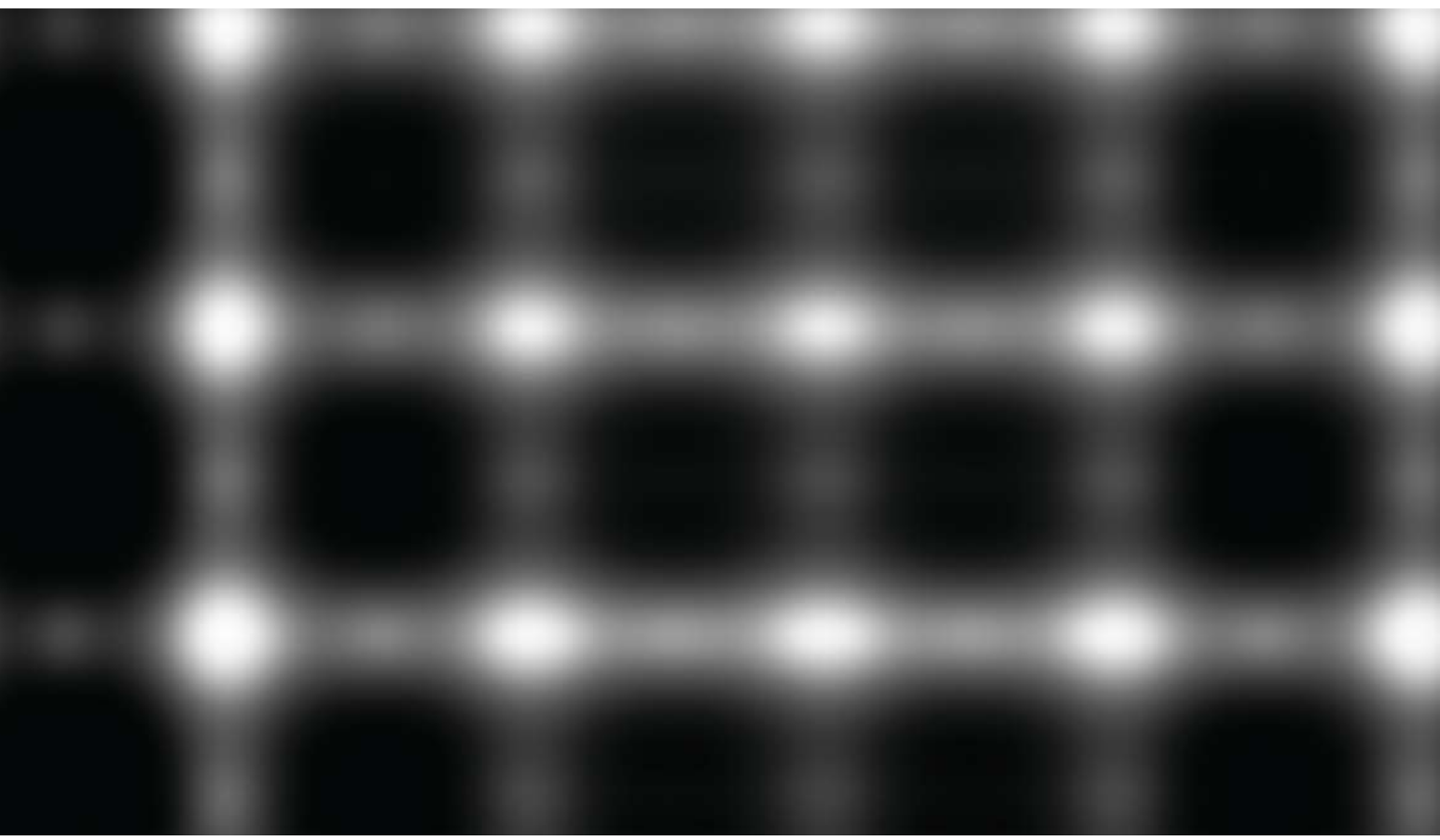

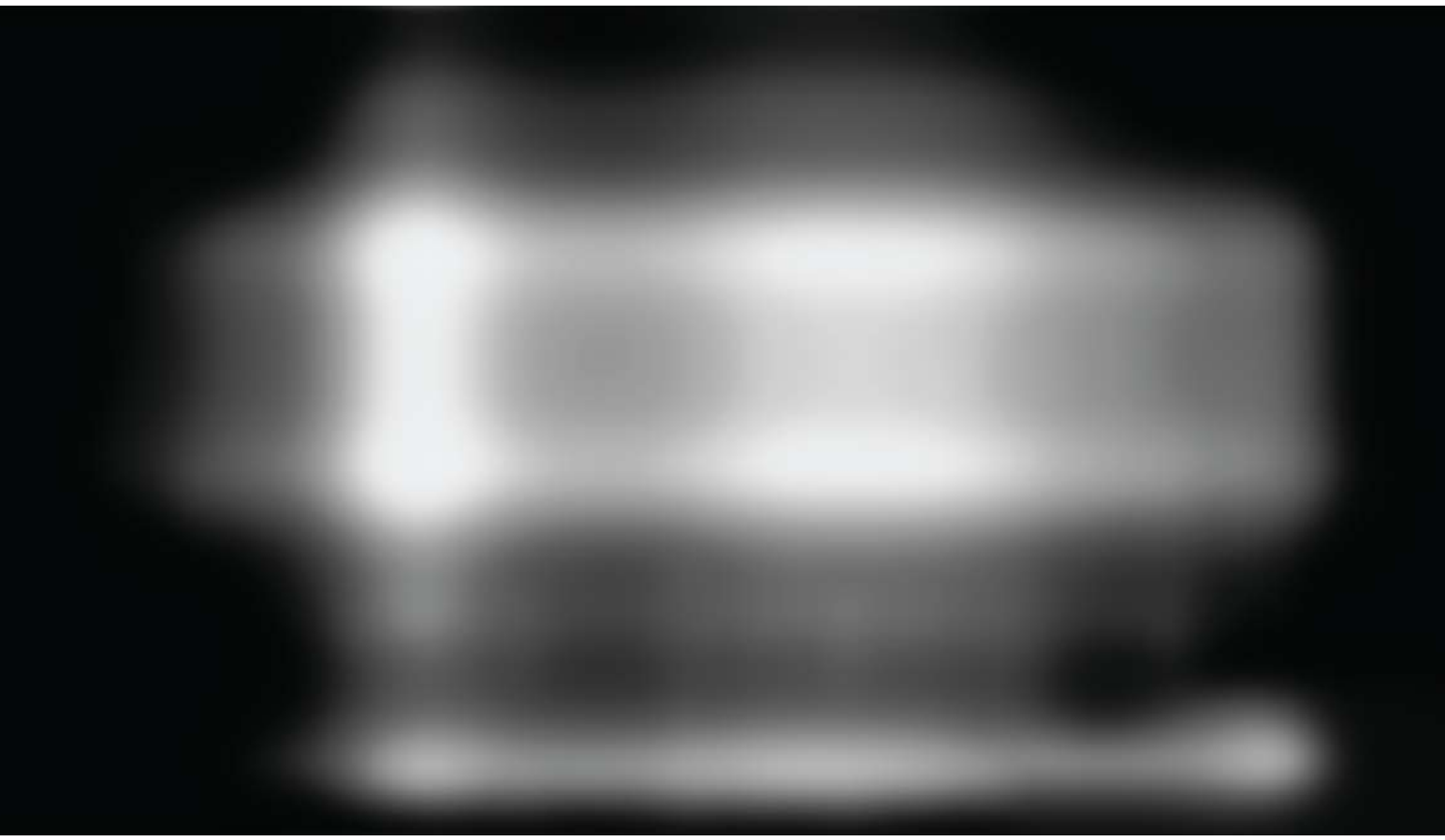

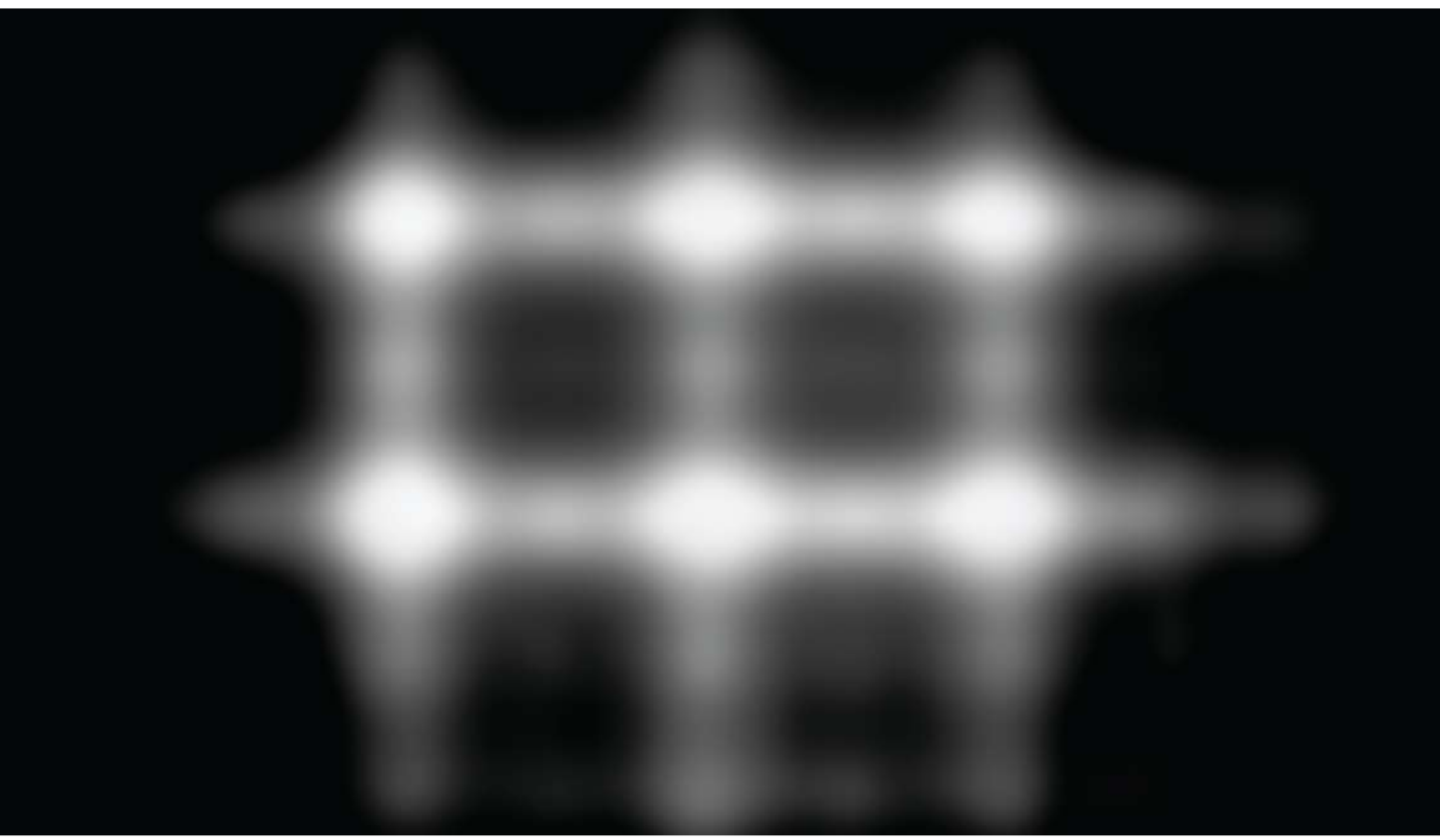

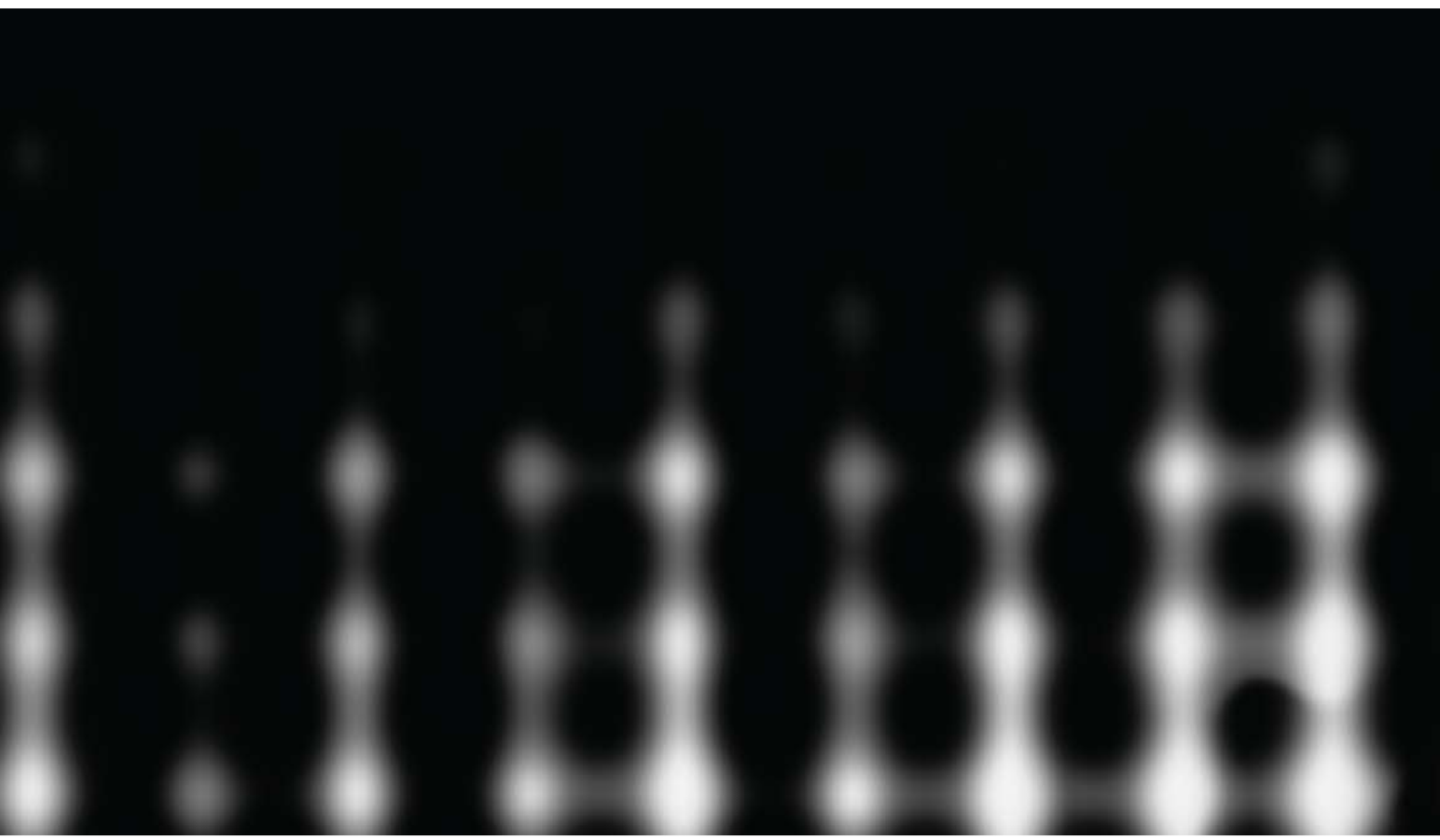

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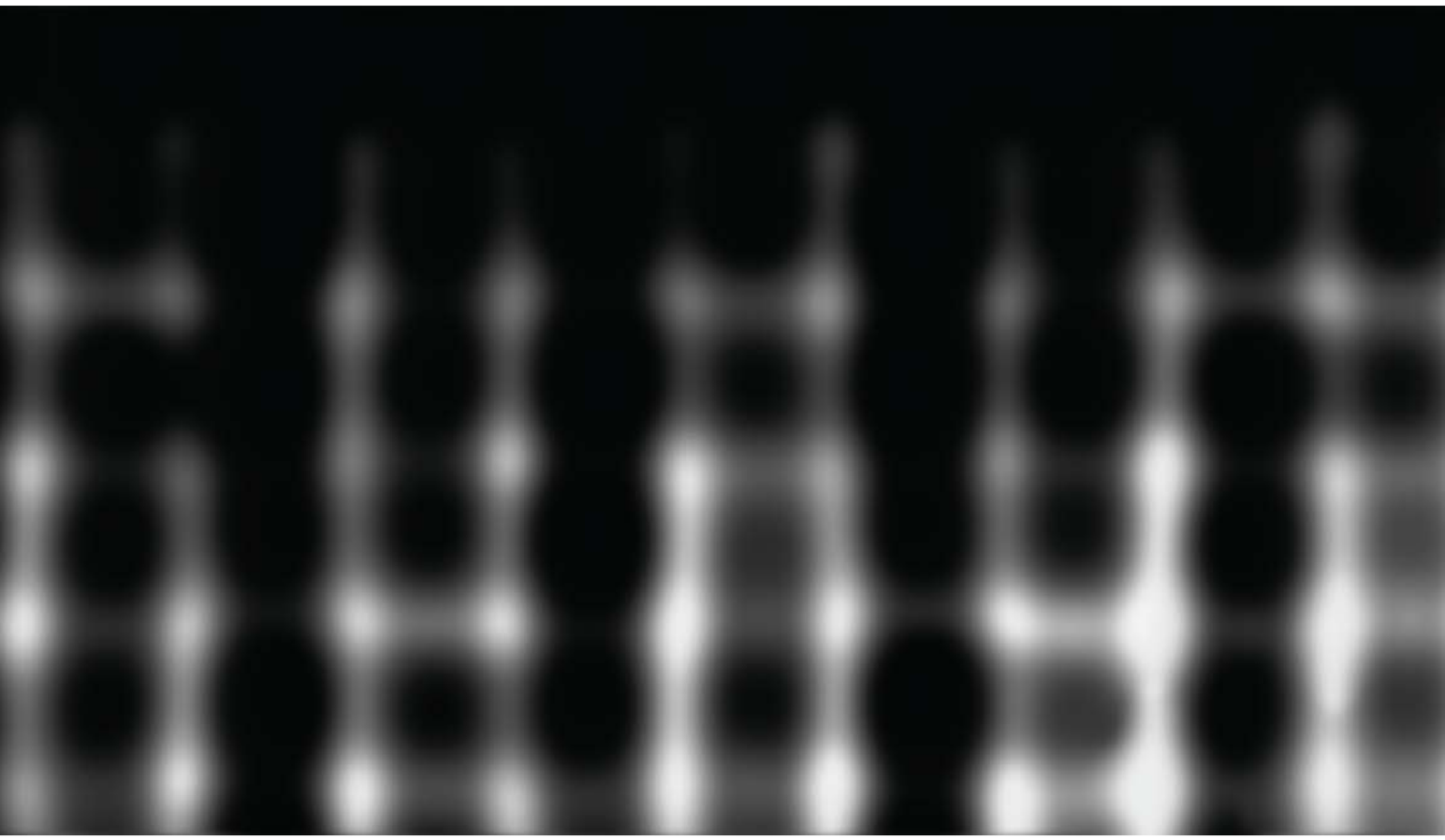

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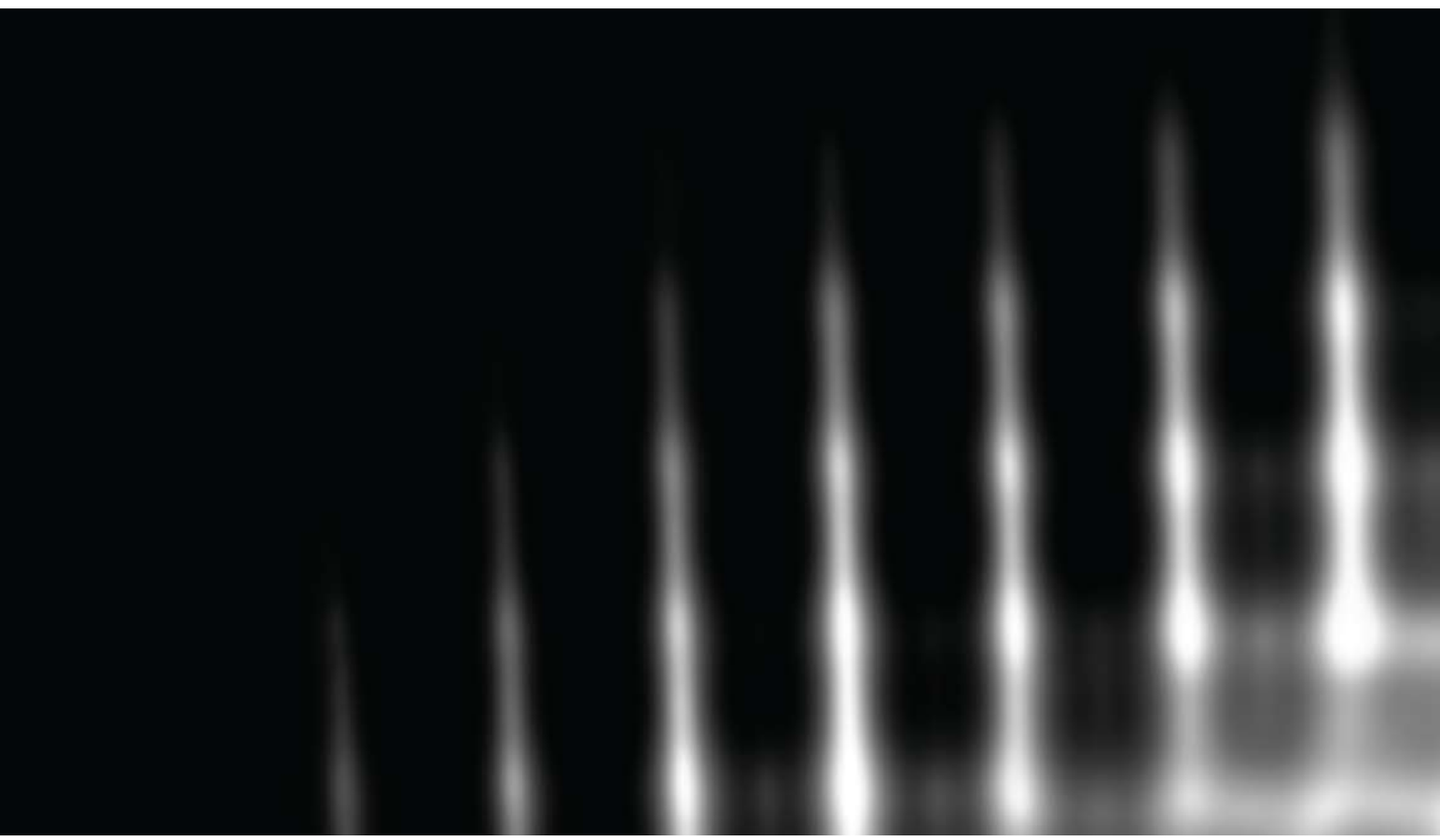

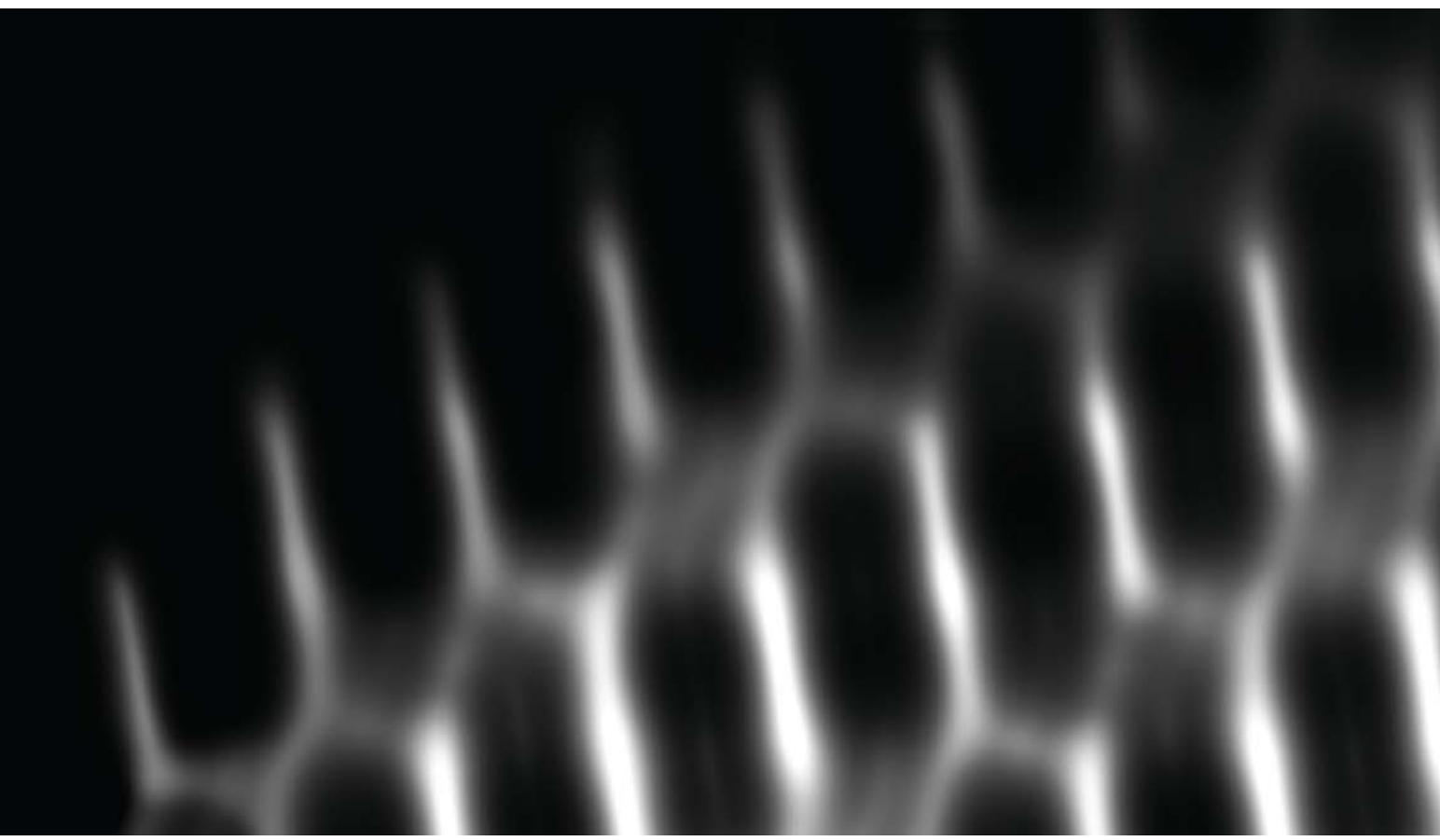

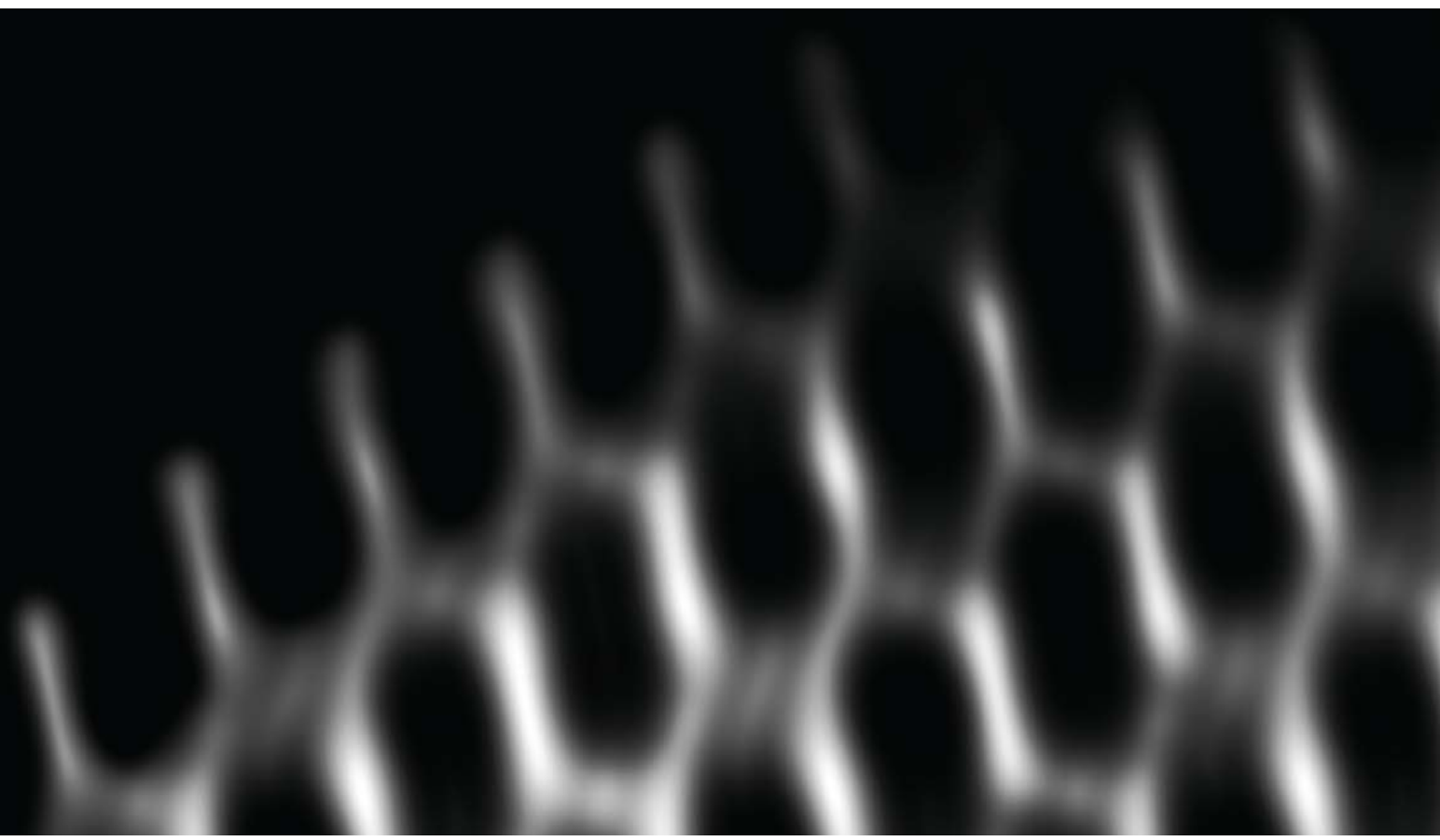

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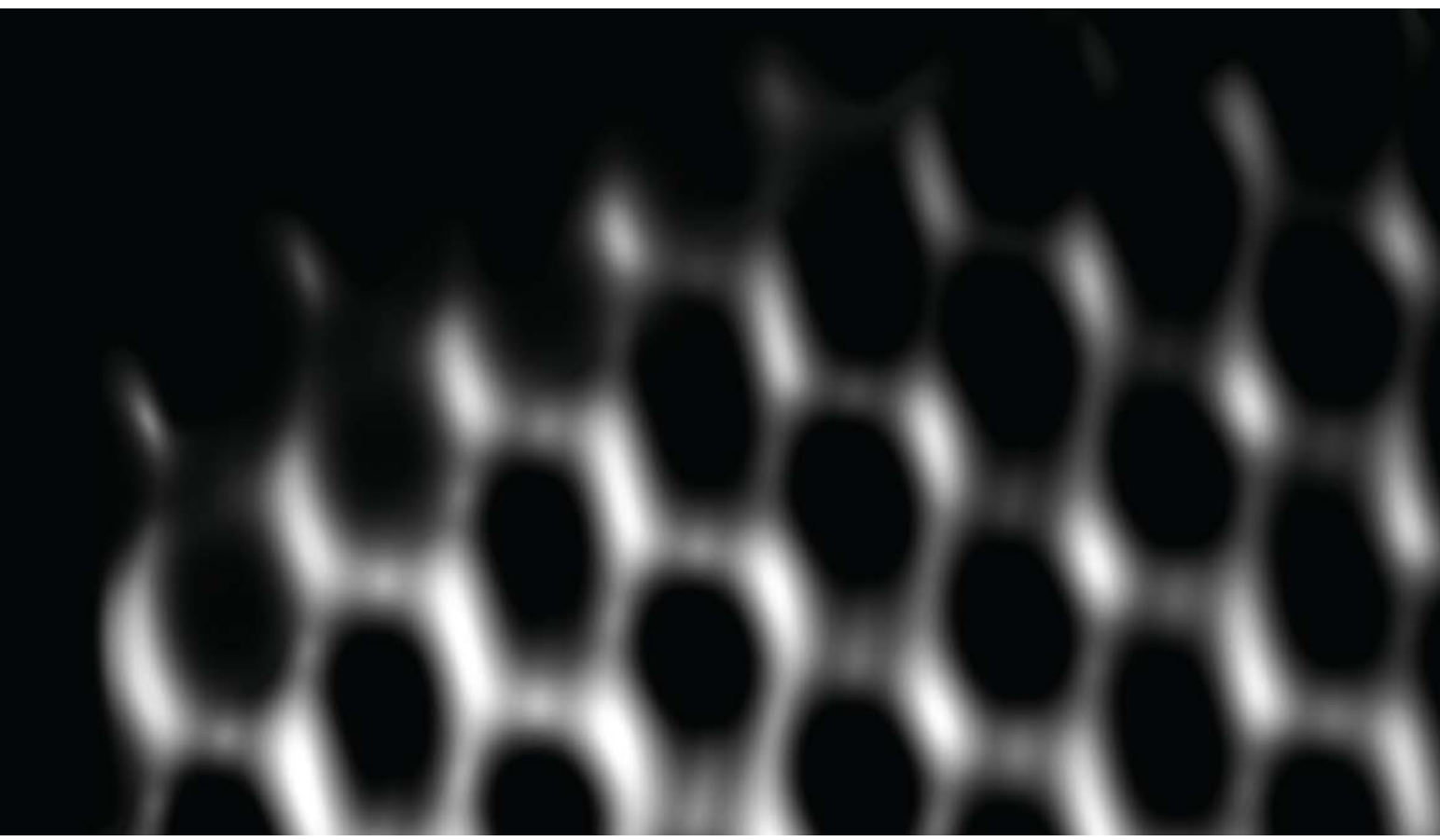

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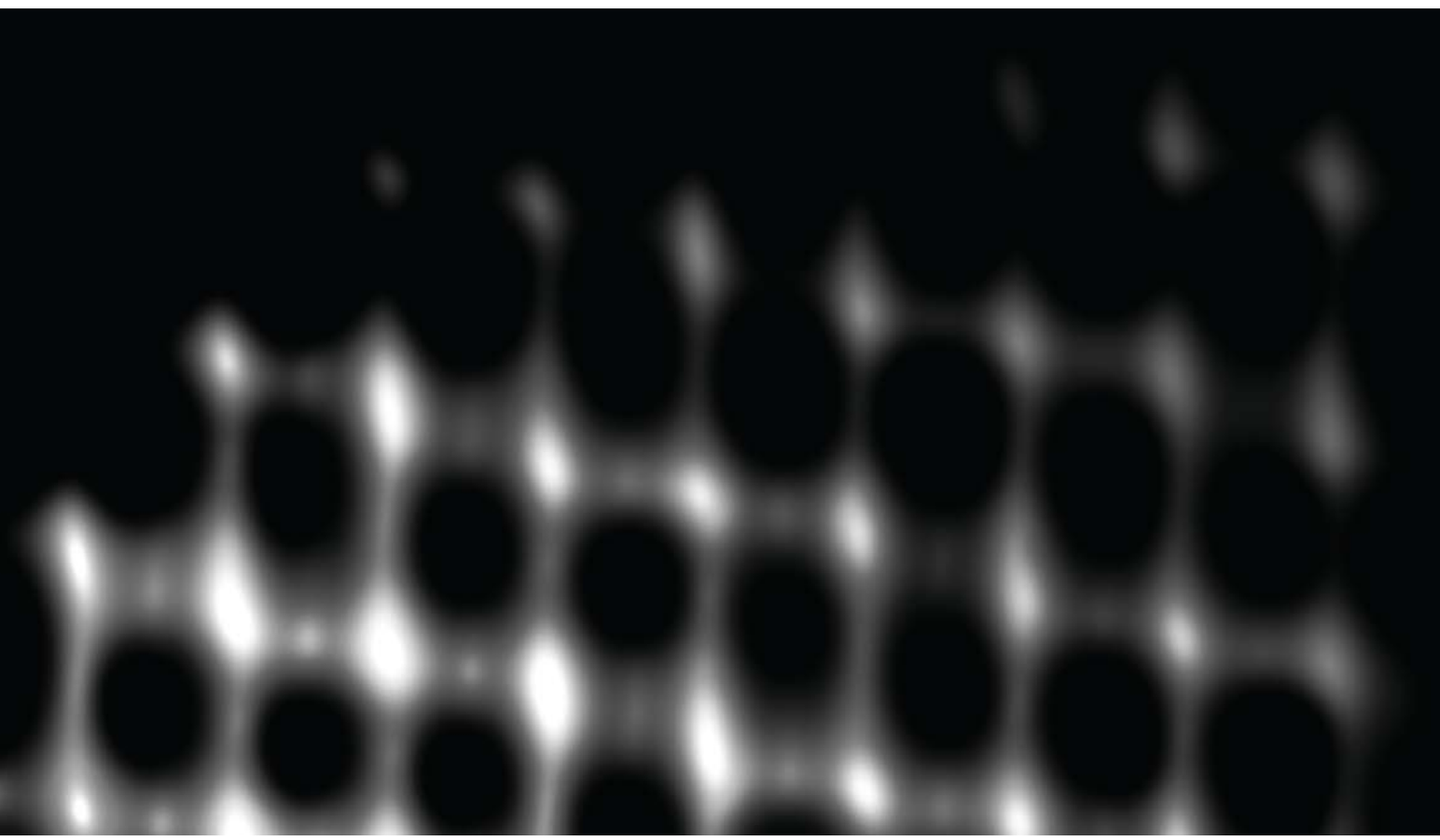

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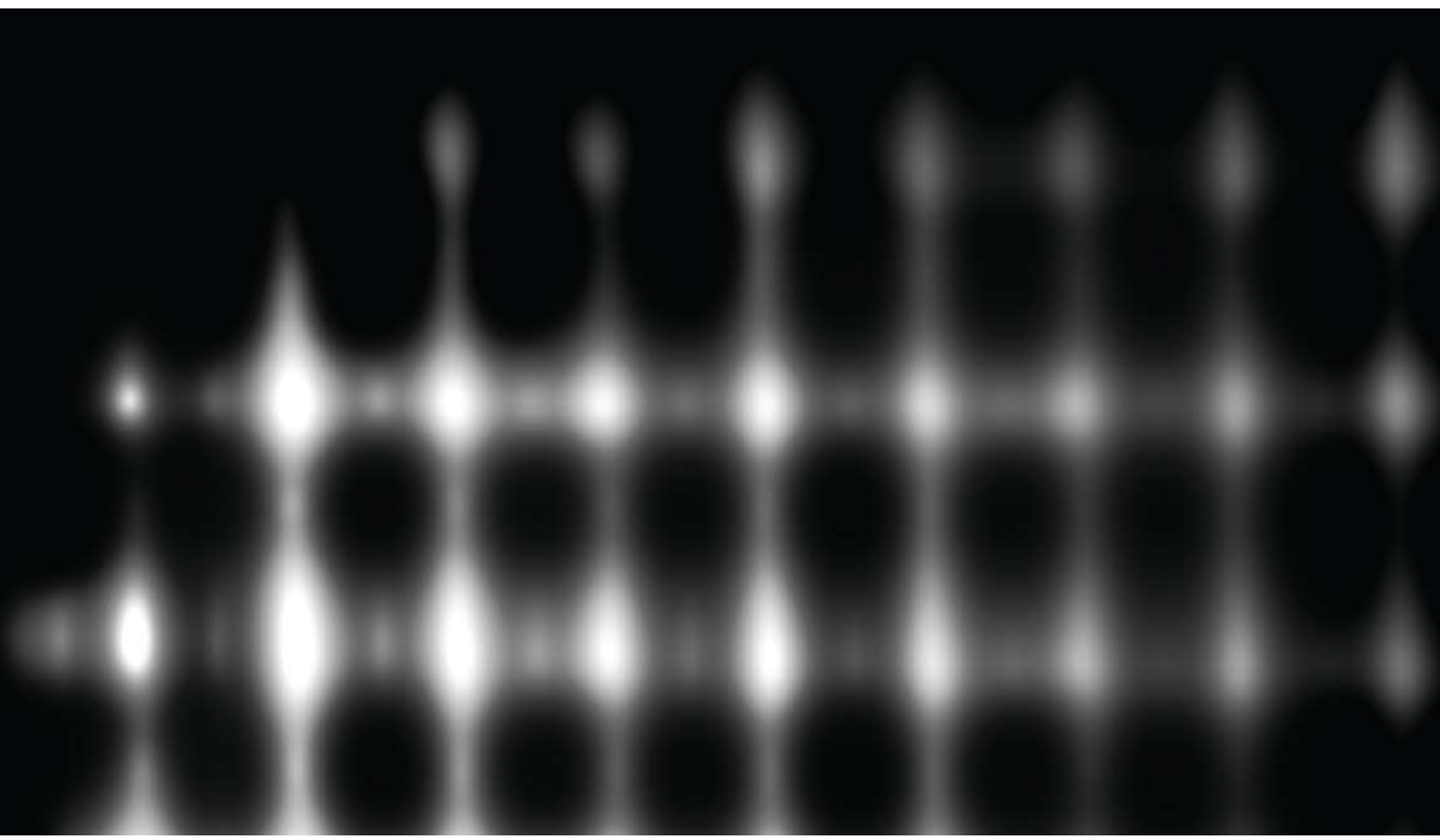

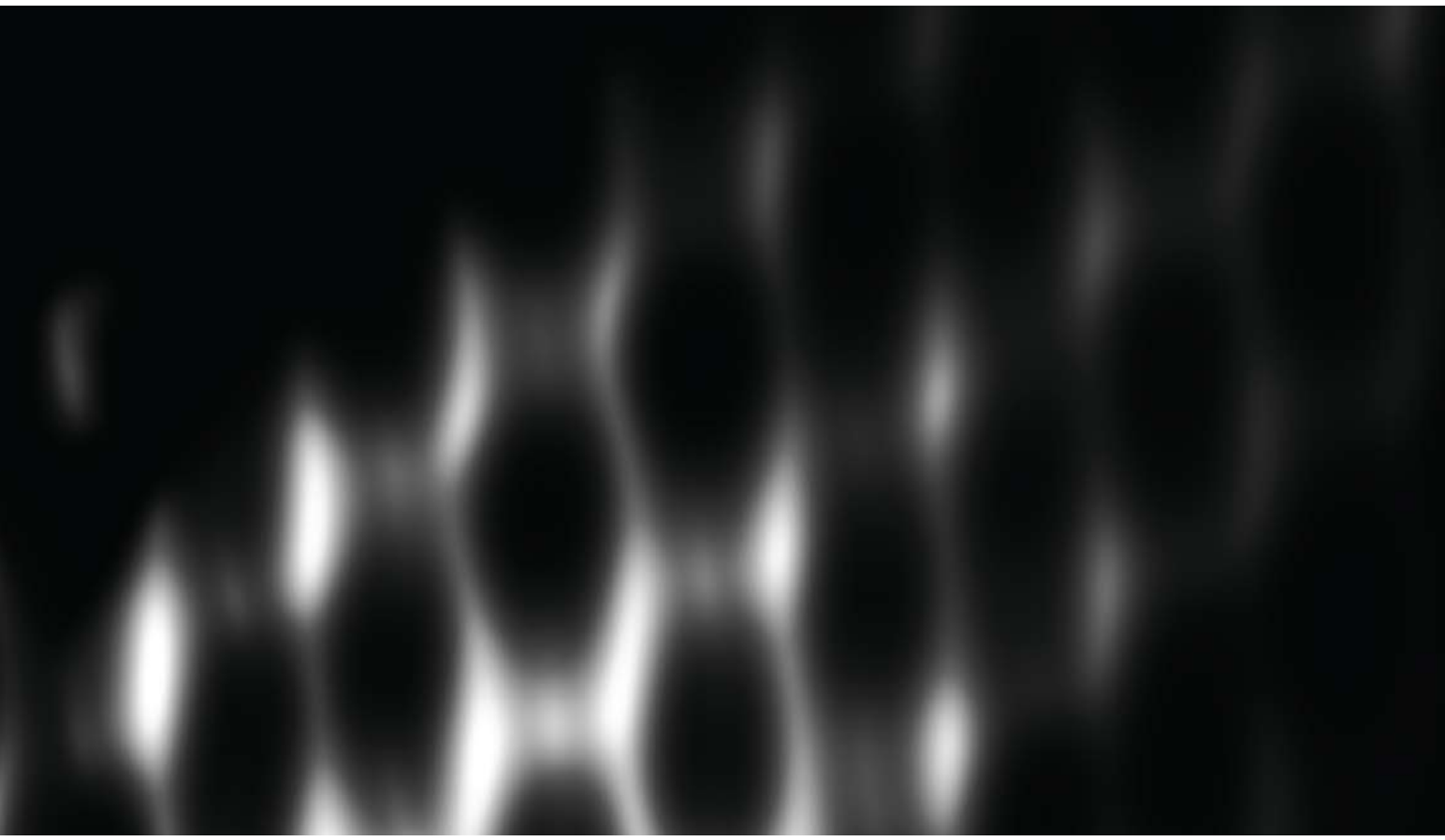

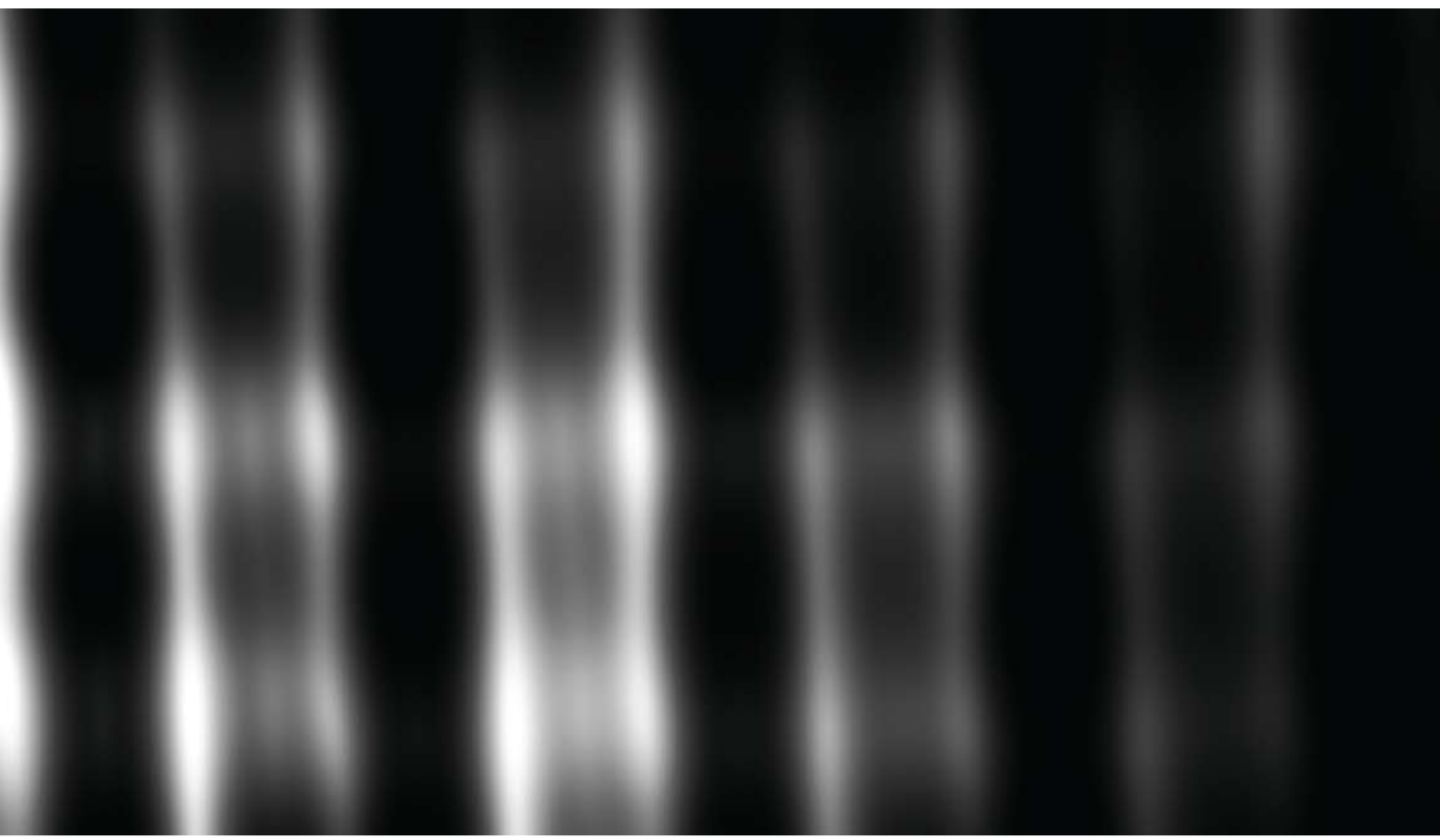

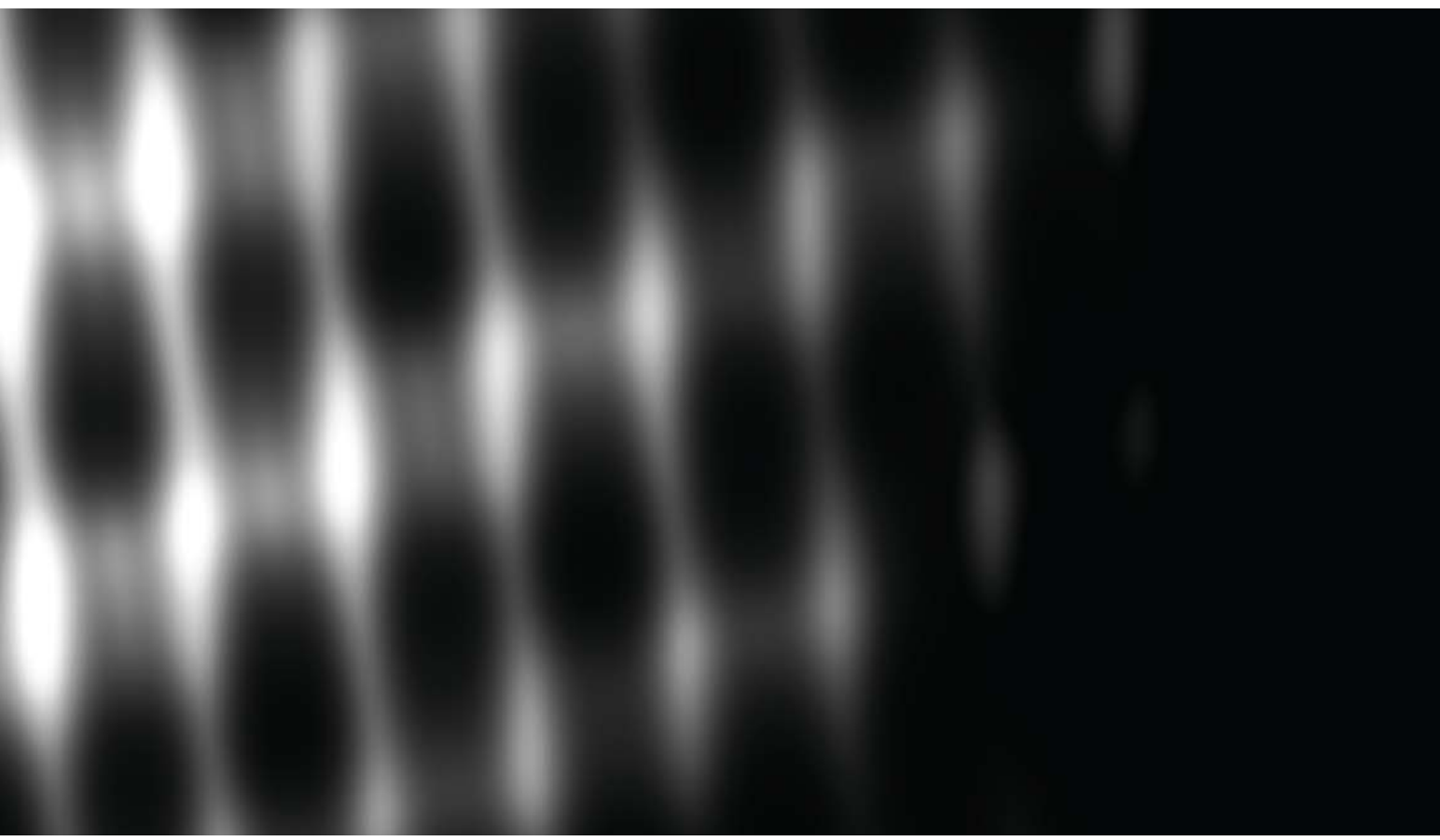

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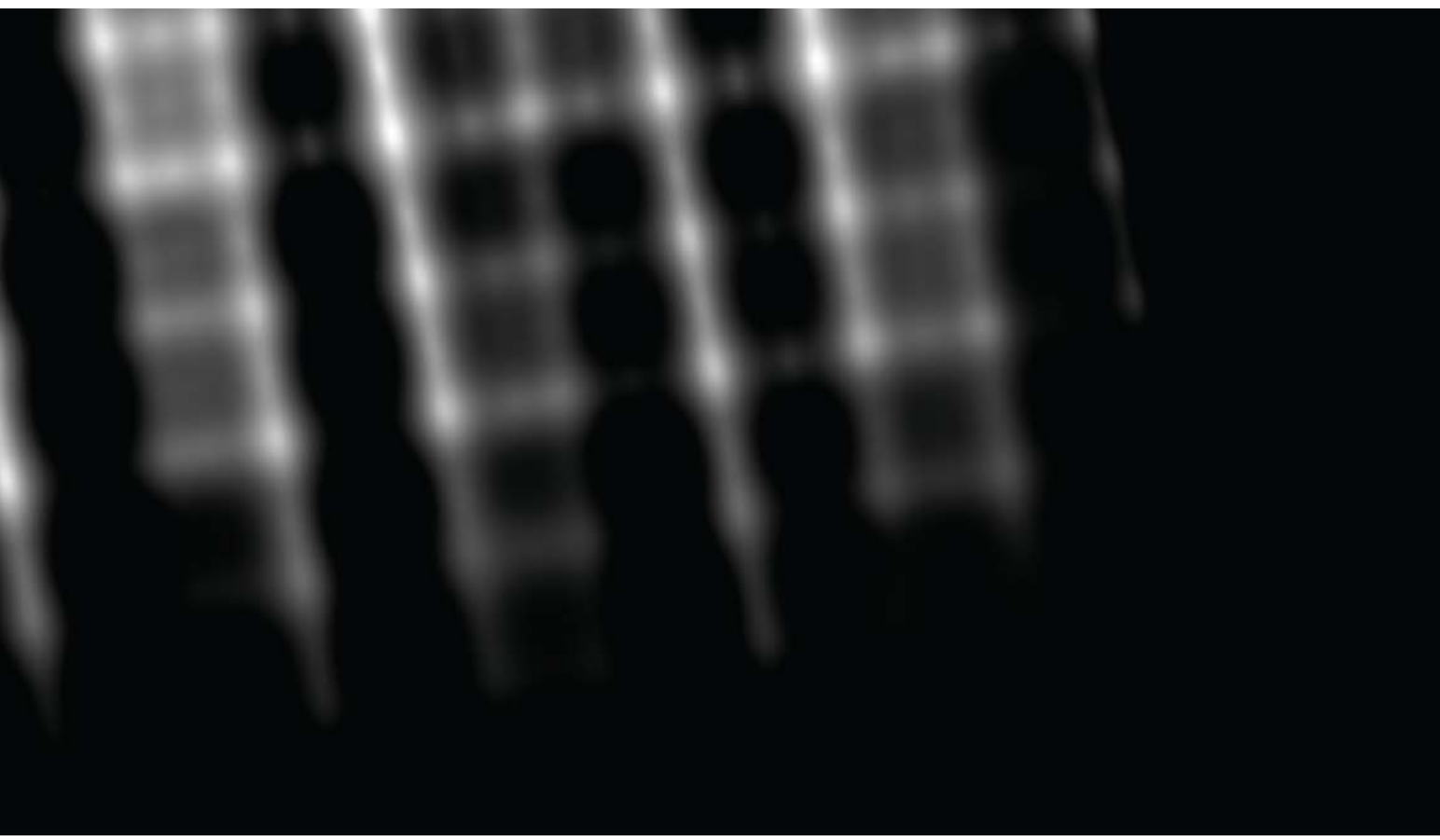

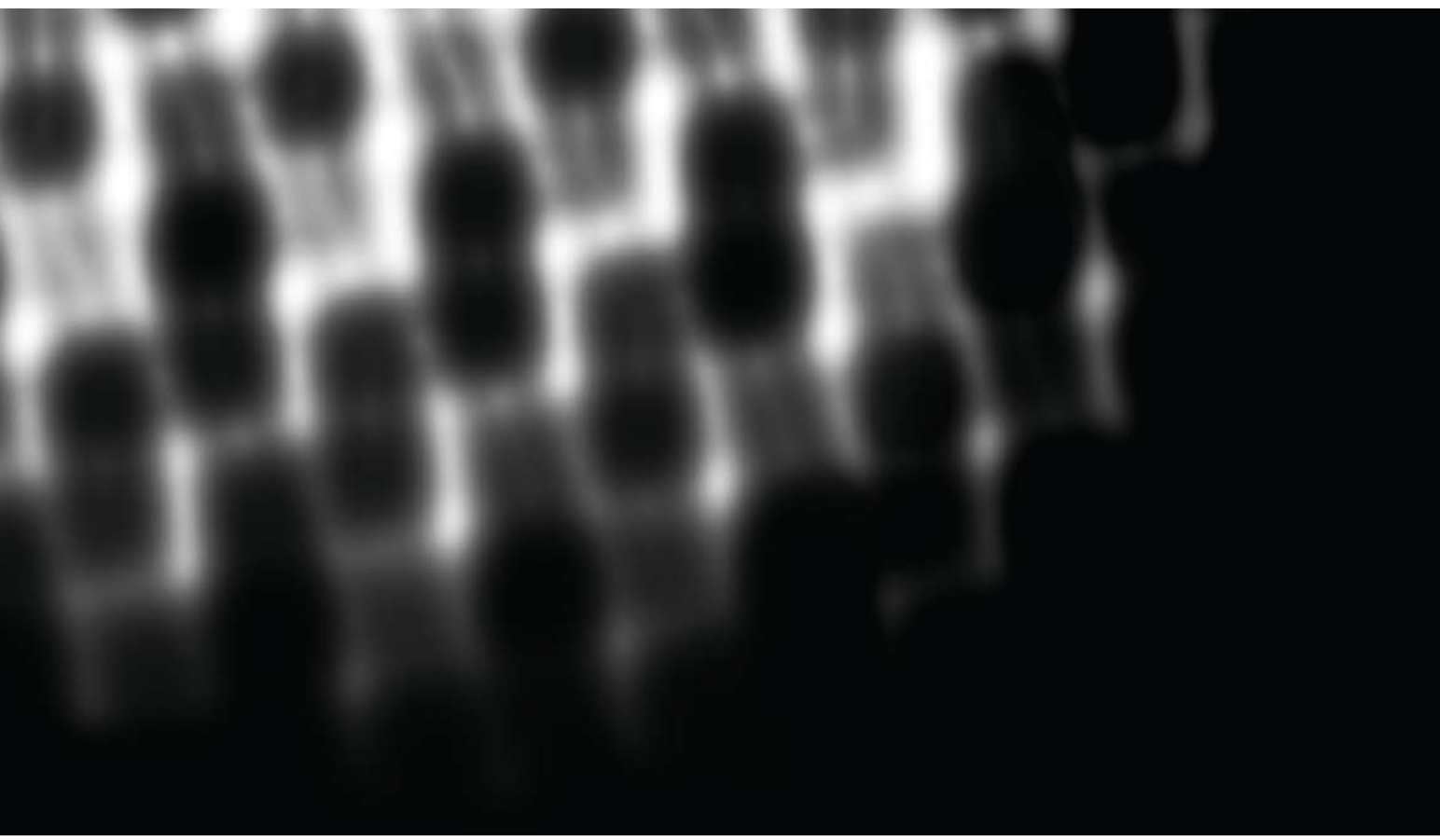

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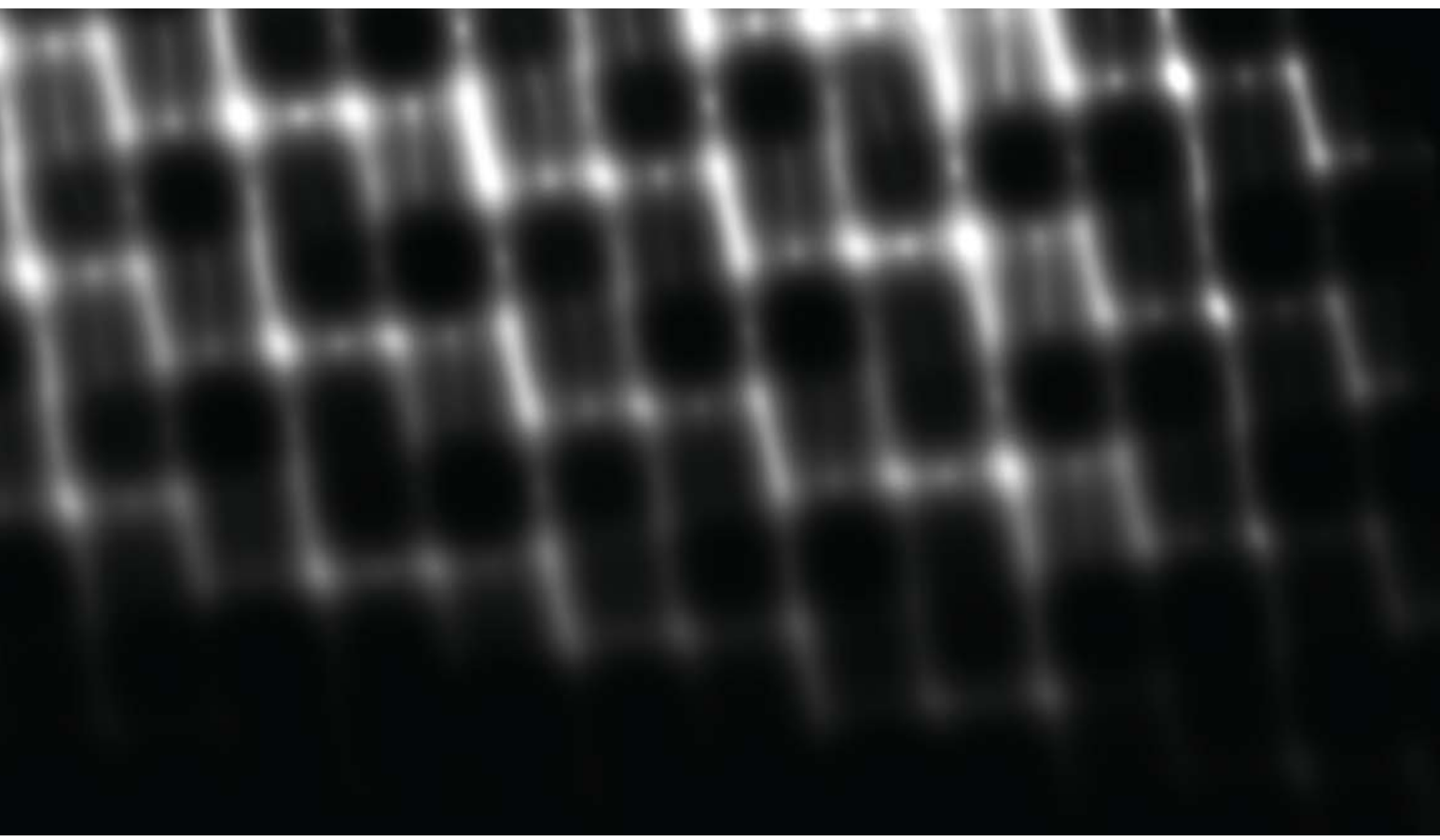

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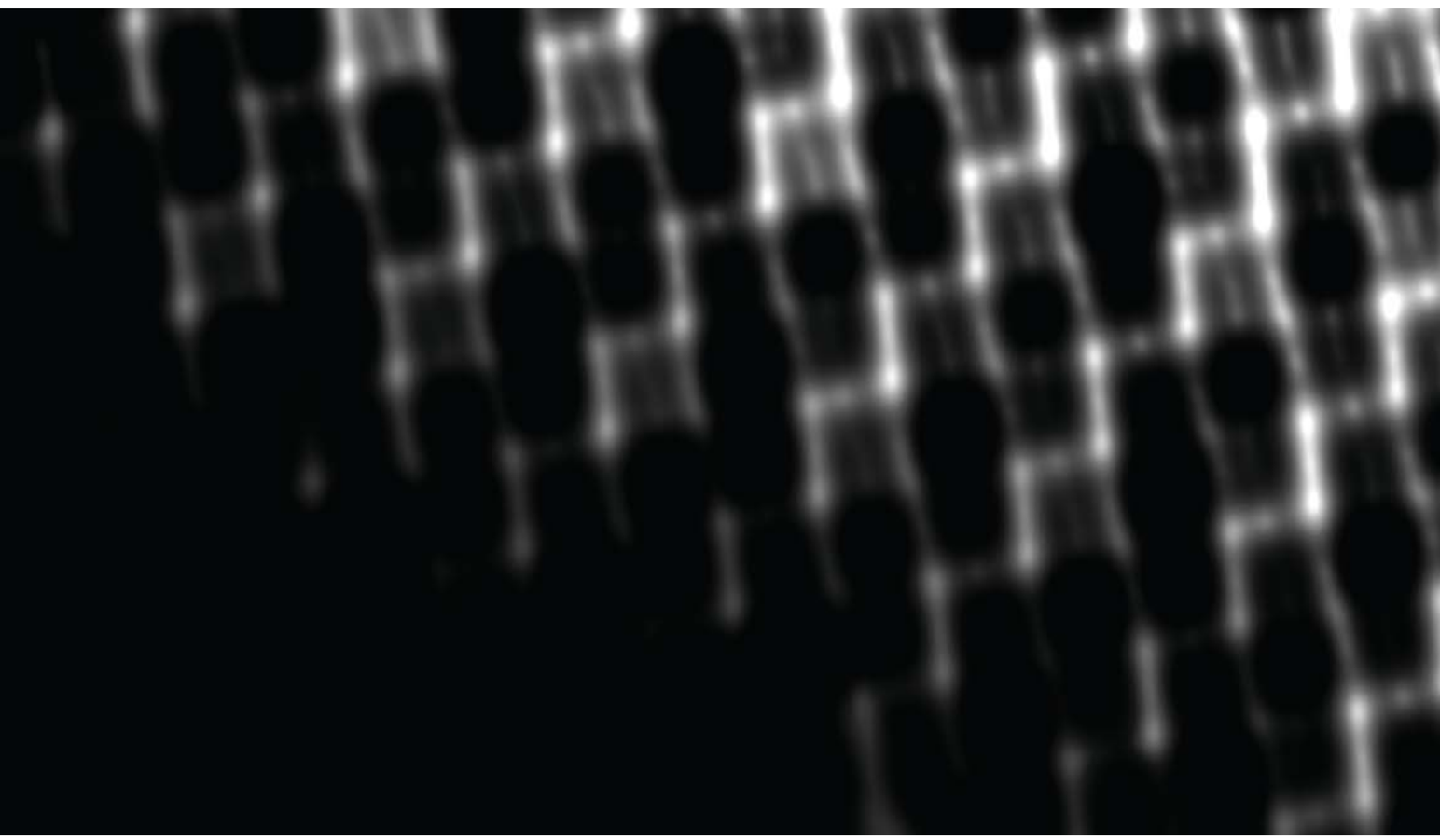

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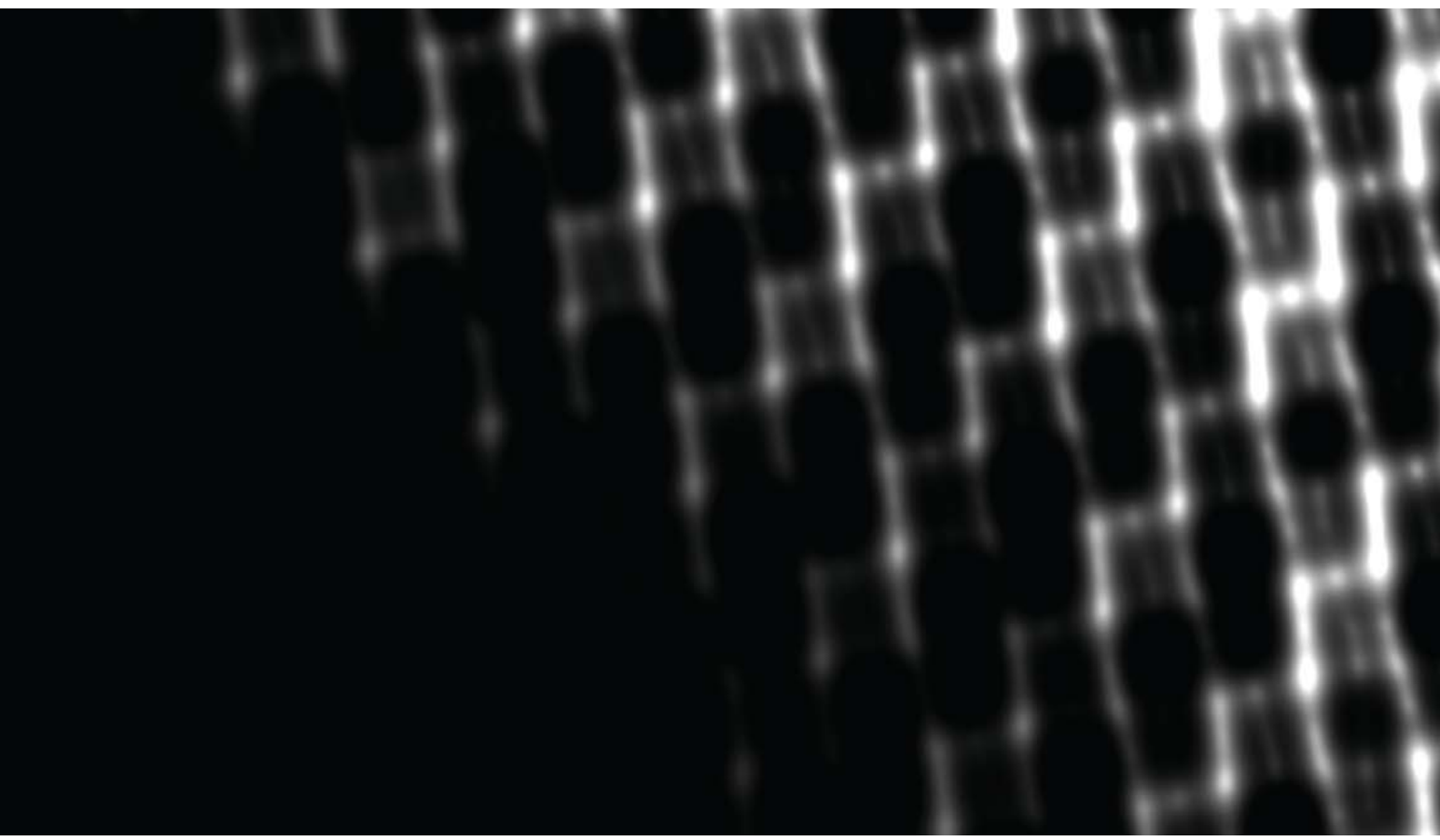

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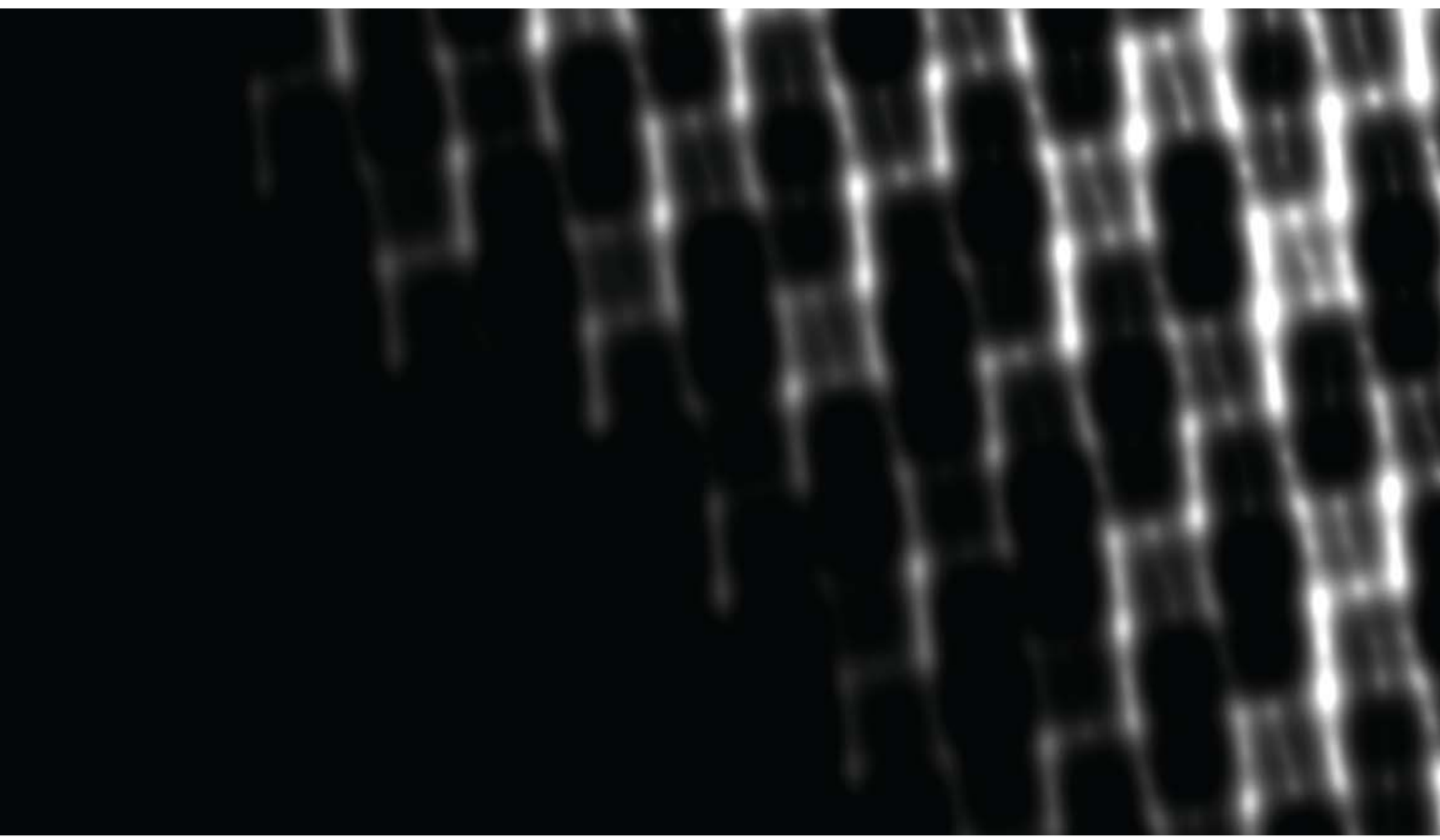

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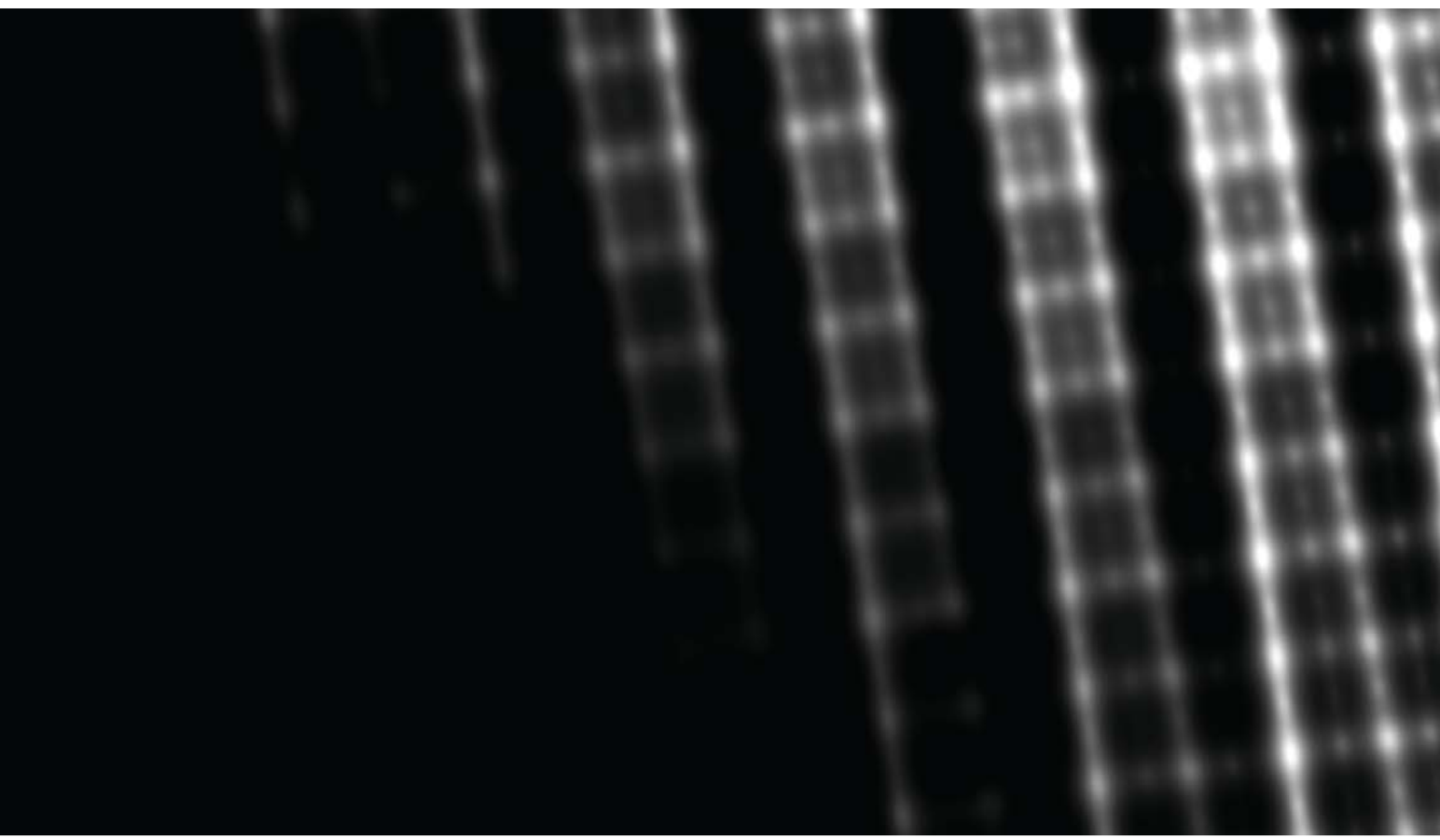

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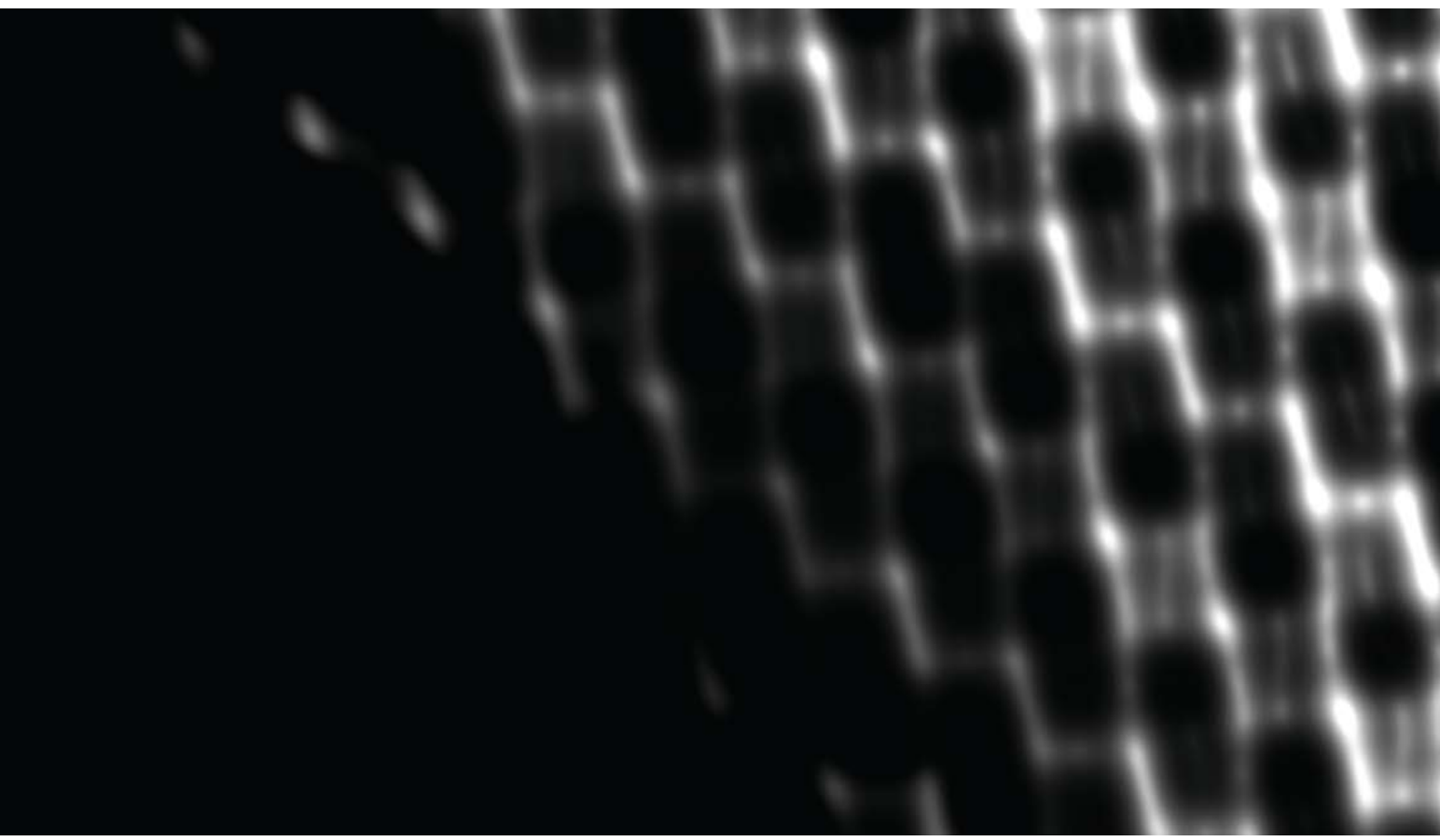

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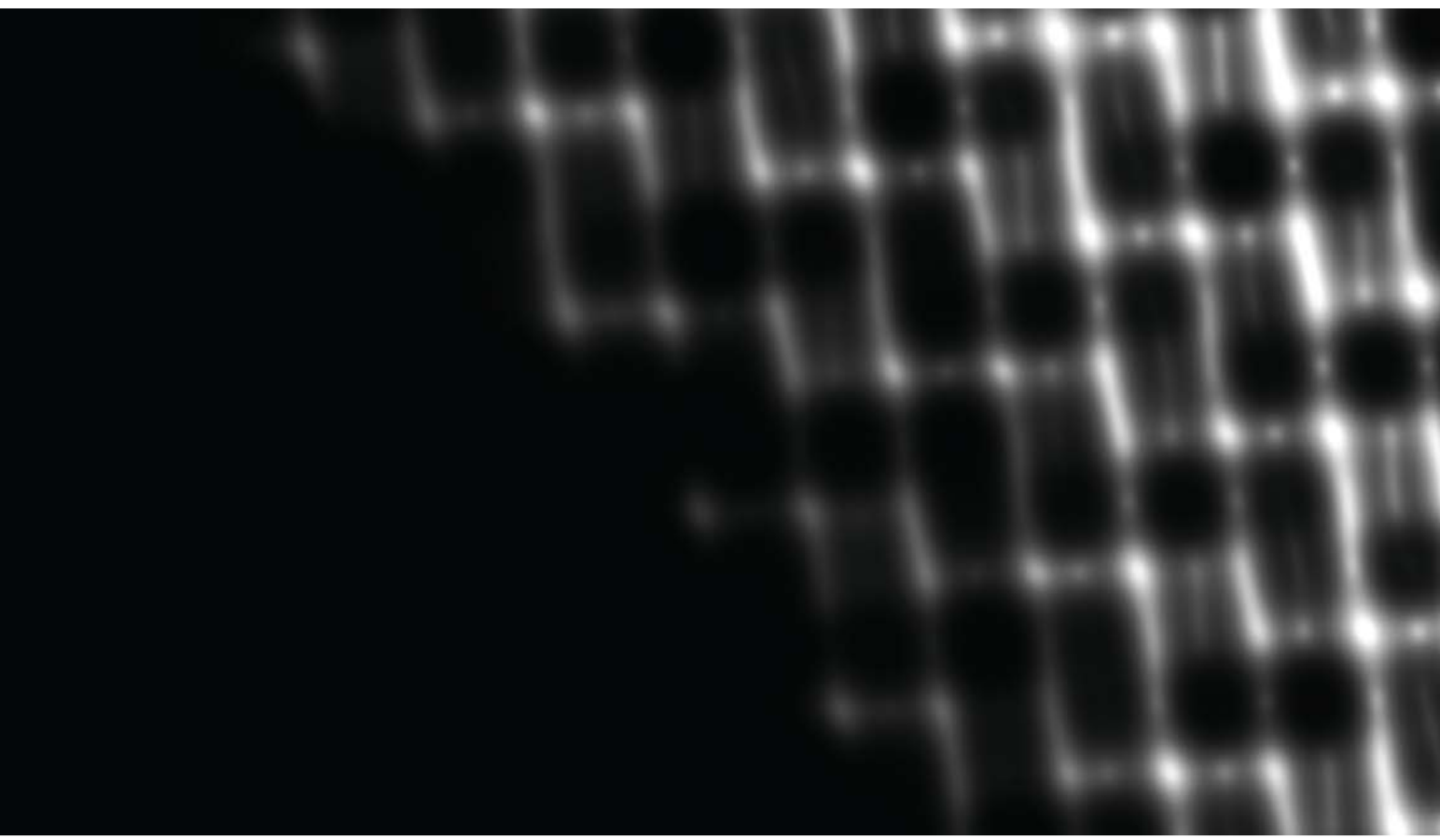

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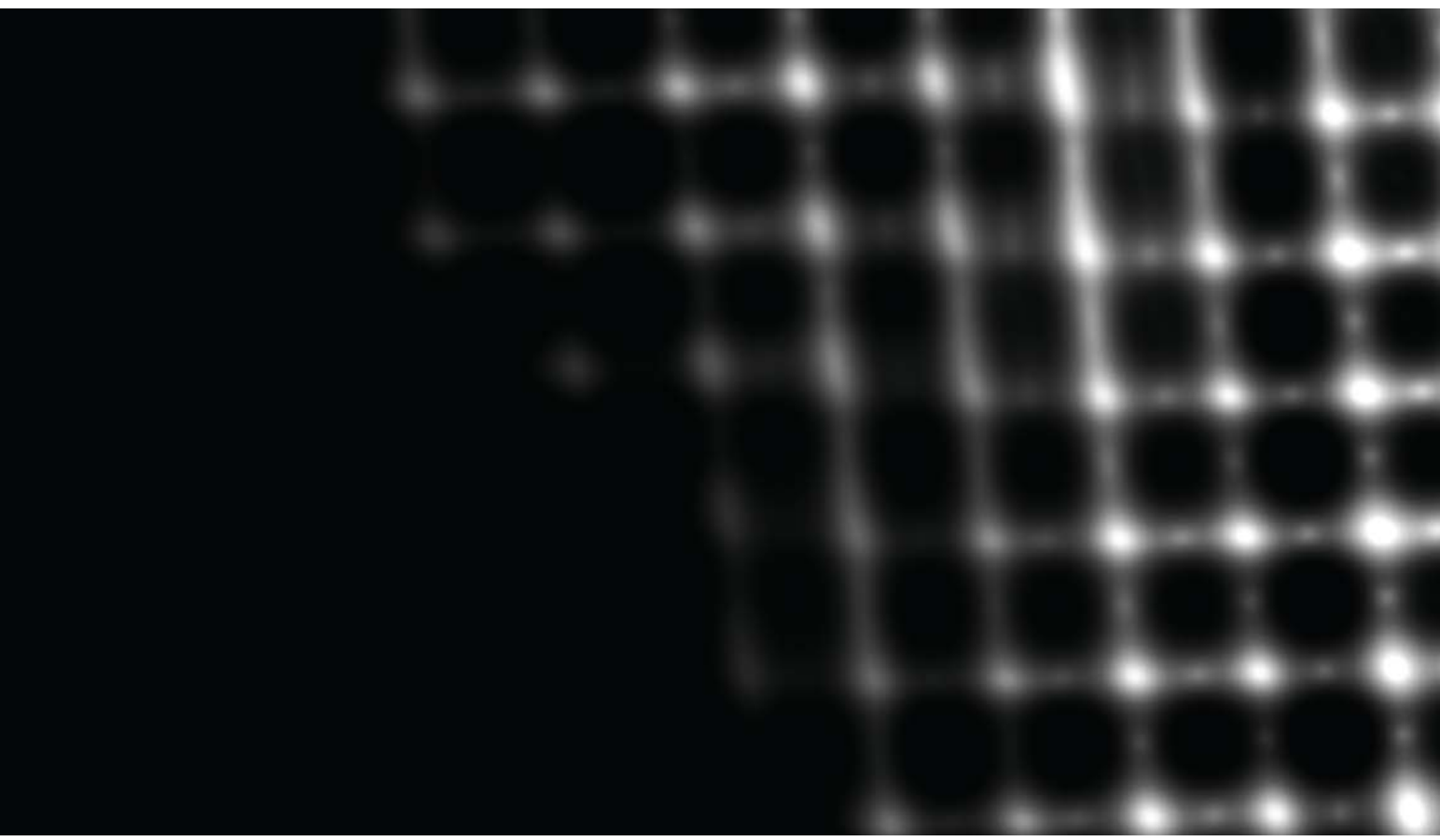

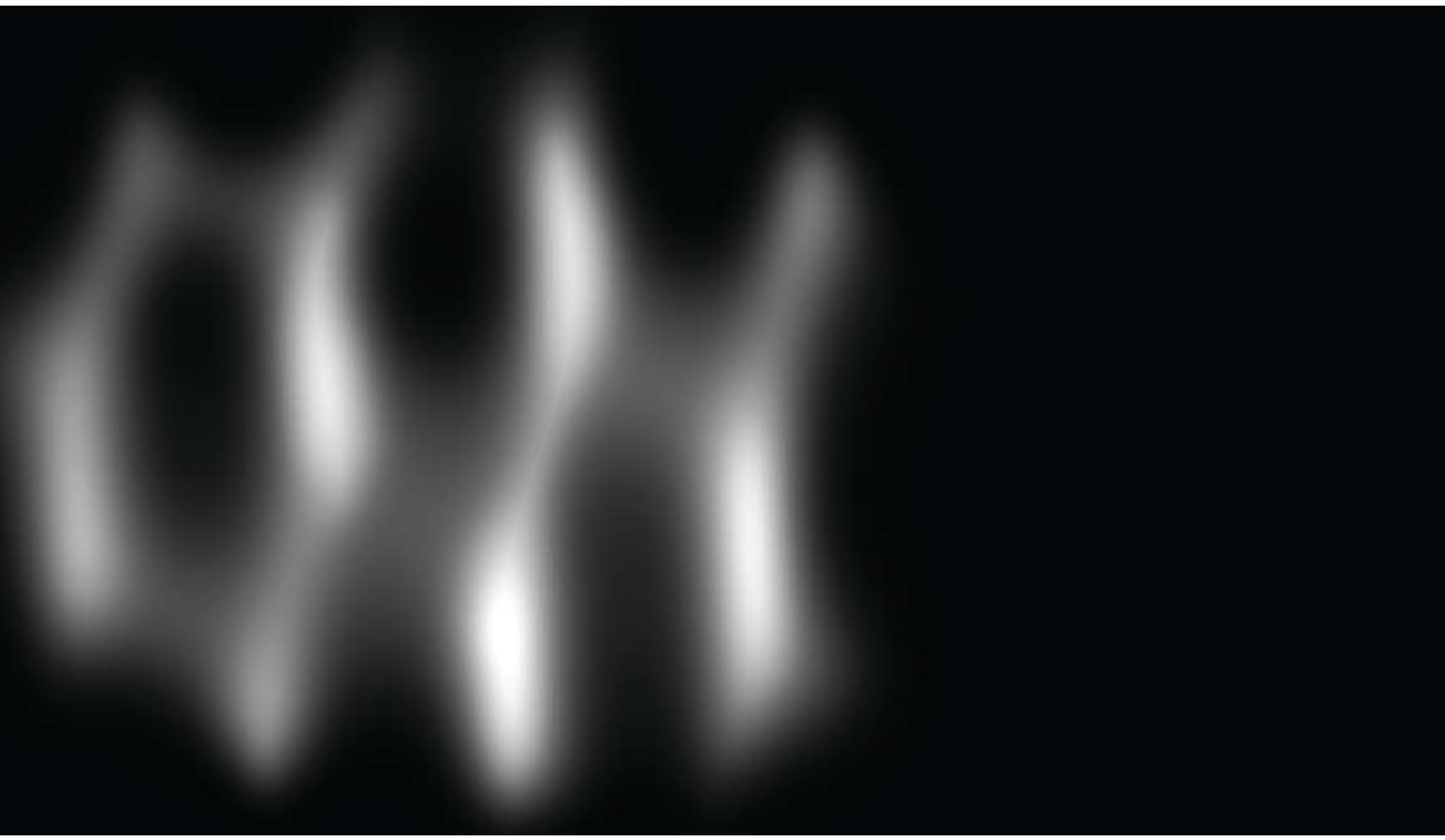

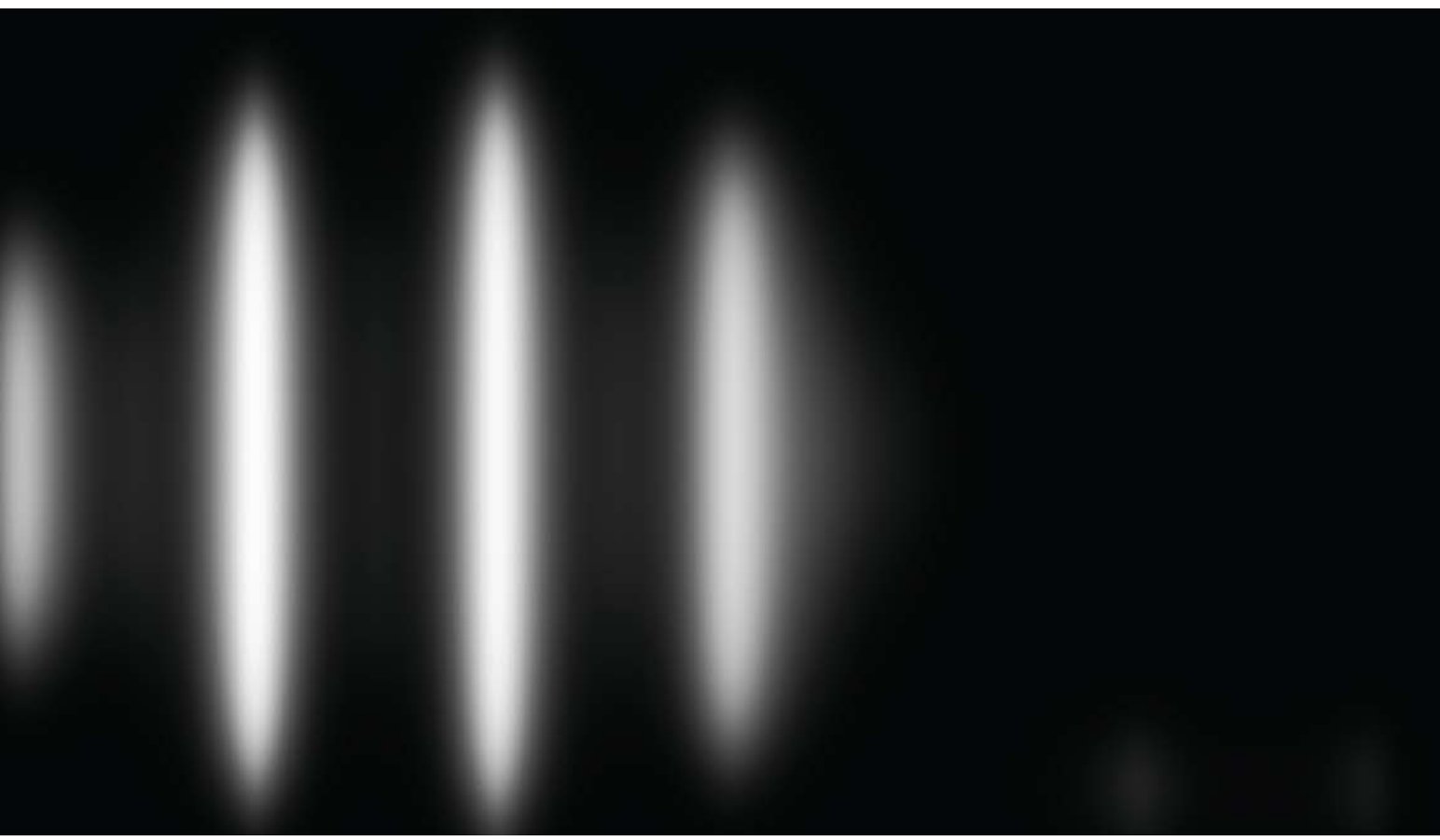

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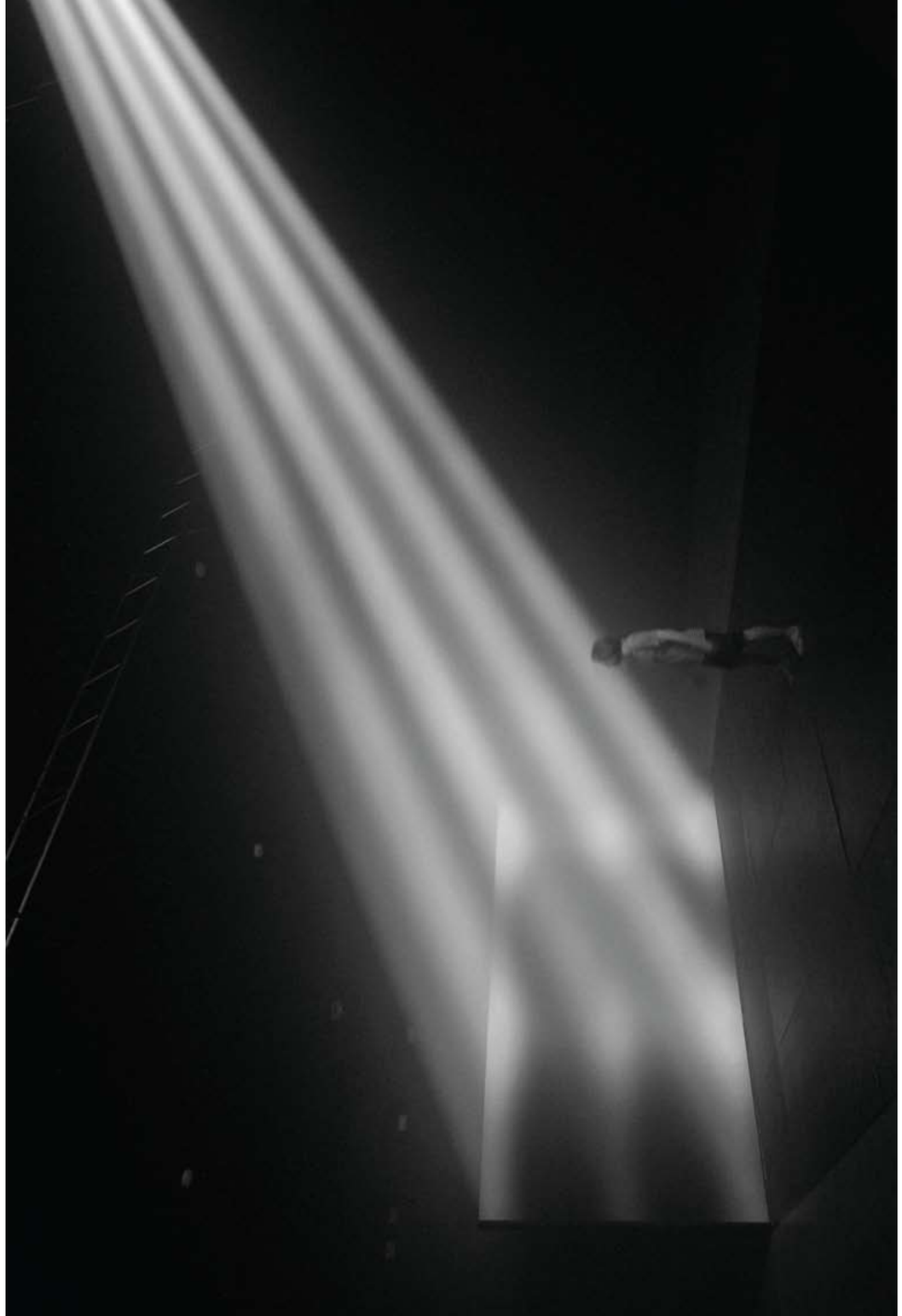

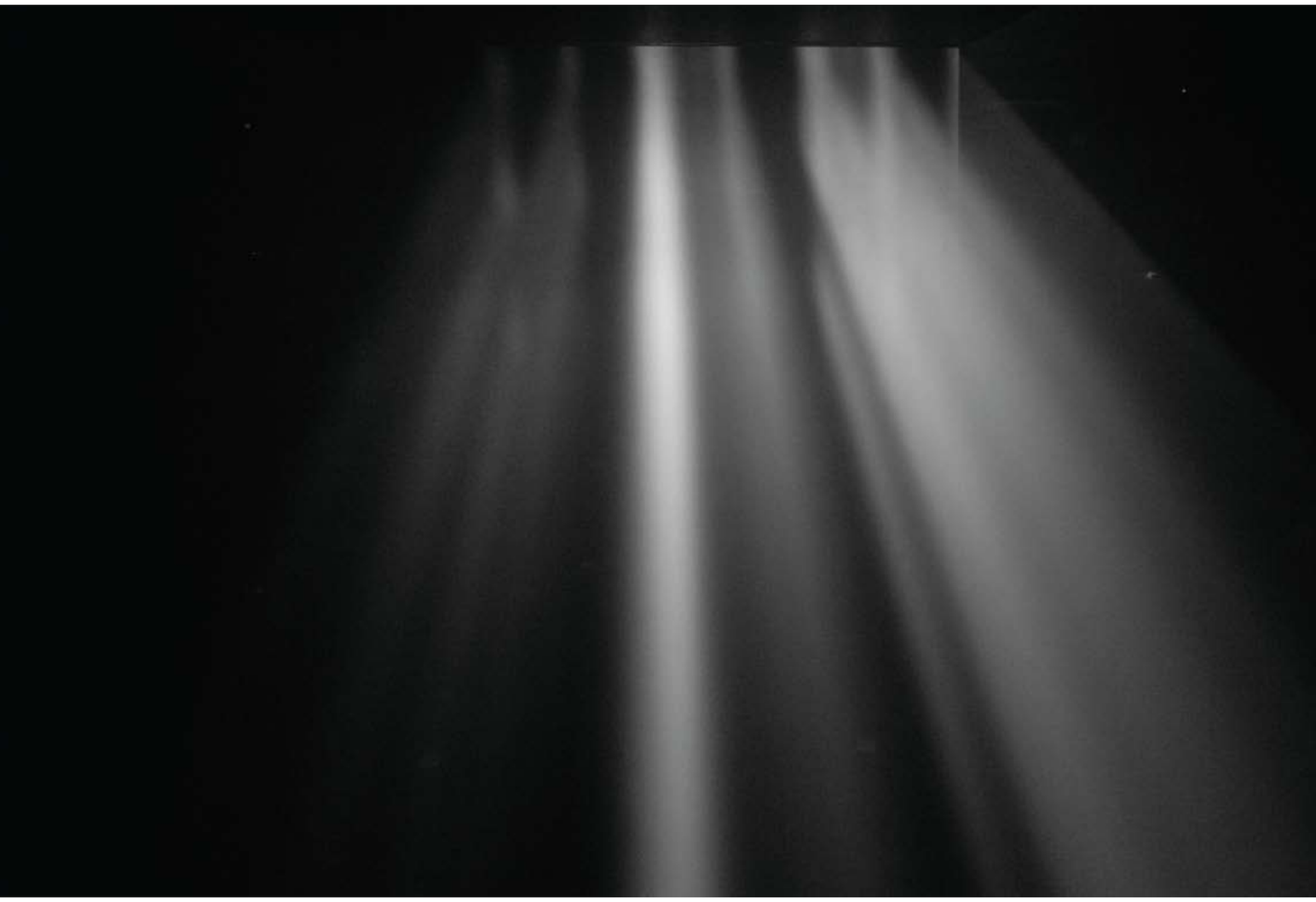

carsten nicolai . *fades*

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this dvd features the source movie for the *fades* installation (2006). the movie projection is a key element of the installation, applied as a modulated light source rather than as a movie in the classical sense. it develops its essential visual language only in connection with a fine mist, through which it is projected.

in the book, the work is illustrated through 48 stills from the movie, together with four installation views.

for more information about where to experience the real installation on site, please check the news section (exhibitions) on www.carstennicolai.de