Paul Hertz

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Paul Hertz was engaged in making algorithmic art for several years before he acquired a personal computer. He has worked in a variety of media—prints, drawings and watercolors, photographs, installations, performance, music, and digital media—and in many styles, often under different pseudonyms: Juan Teodosio Pescador (also known by his stage name Ignotus or Ignotus the Mage), Pescador's grandniece Alma de la Serra, and Darrell Luce. After receiving his BA in Fine Arts from Brown University in 1971, he moved to Spain where he lived for 12 years working across disciplines, collaborating with musicians and theatrical performers. While in Spain, Hertz developed a generative system for intermedia art.

In 1979 Hertz wrote an algorithm for creating artwork that used handmade punch cards, much like John Cage used the I Ching and random numbers, to inform the elements of a composition. The algorithm included a set of five polygons grouped into four different squares. Hertz described the process: "My first 'program' for the ignosquares consisted of a deck of 32 homemade punch cards. I engaged other people in a game where they chose cards face down, turning them over at the last minute to reveal a pattern which I would then interpret as Ignotus the Mage, a dysfunctional fortuneteller."(16)

The symbols on the punch cards dictated the width of lines and the placement of the polygons which Hertz then executed by hand. The delicate ink drawing *Aiguabarreig* is one such example. When he returned to the United States, Hertz enrolled at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he learned to work with computers as a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in Art and Technology, earning an MFA in Time Arts in 1985. His full engagement with computer programming happened in 1992 when he began working as a designer and programmer at Northwestern University.

Although Hertz's algorithmic program was created with a great deal of humor and tongue-in-cheek intent, the resulting images are exquisite fields of seemingly repetitive patterns. Their meticulous execution arises out of an elaborate formal language. The elements seem to have been arranged in the moment; the algorithm acting without conscious control.

Debora Wood
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The field of visual complexity found in the art of the Bangerts, Verostko, and Hébert is also reflected in the work of Paul Hertz. Hertz's practice, however, possesses a totalizing system that directs all his digital experimentation. The artist's Gesamtkunstwerk acts as continuum, an artistic response to the world around him. These reactions are not just to the physical realities but also to the theories that undercut all belief systems. The artist attempts to understand a theory—be it mathematical, political, or cultural—and then subvert its logic through algorithmic methods. His tool for exploration is code and his subversion involves a complex imagining of a generative possibilities inherent in a mode of thought. As a result, Hertz's generative practice is prolific. As a way to organize his unending visual response to the world of intellectual constructs and the stream of data that bombards our everyday phonological experience he has created the universe of "igno." As a suitable vehicle to carry the ambiguity and sense of play inherent in his practice, Hertz classifies his art into different levels and paths that creates a type of superstructure that informs all his work. Hertz's interest in intermedia and generative systems began in Spain in the 1970s when new media was beginning to infiltrate the art scene there. His early works, such as *Aiguabarreig*, 1979, (Fig. 11) show his interest in the four-color theorem and all the permutations inherent in the geometric variation of a tile system. The artist's work would remain indebted to Spanish intellectuals and writers to this day. Once he moved back to the United States, he became a major part of the Chicago art and technology scene, teaching a variety of innovative courses on software development and virtual reality at Northwestern University and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Hertz, always a community minded individual, emerged as an innovative curator and writer, eventually becoming a great proponent of pioneers of digital art and as a promoter of emergent artists. Beyond the inventiveness of his generative systems, what made his practice so original was the way he took the rationalistic approach and the dead-pan seriousness of computational modes and injected it with humor and whimsy. The artist's alter ego, Ignotus Mago (the unknown wizard in its Latin form), imagined the digital realm as an ever-shifting supernatural world of shadows and illusions. While Hertz's "igno" world is one of dizzying contradiction, it is also one of improvisation. Language and forms, be they textual, musical or visual, are continually interwoven. Once you are following his theoretical trail, he suddenly shifts, moving toward mixed and multidimensional media forms (as seen in his performance works).

Hertz's generative image making system produces excesses that seem to overflow and bamboozle the senses. Works from *The Book of Falling Silent* (Fig. 12) best illustrate the artist's ever modulating field, one built on the changing frequencies of the human voice. Here the artist embraces the errors and slips that continually infiltrate the analog and digital world. The glitch, that an unexpected error or behavior of an electronic device becomes the method for form creation. Glitch art, now a burgeoning subgenre in digital art, sees artists exploiting the error as a way to explore new dimensions of our digital experience.

Grant Taylor
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