

### Intermedia Composition

Visual music, synesthetic art and intermedia have a long but scattered history as inspirational ideas. They do not form a singular tradition, but like an archipelago glimpsed from the continent of art history, they puzzle and beguile the imagination. Systems of correspondence of numbers, musical tones, colors and visual forms and “old” new media such as panoramas, color organs and light shows foreshadow possibilities that current computational technology can finally realize and surpass. High-speed computation permits precise timing of multimodal events in real-time responsive environments. Binary code provides a common representation for all media and so enables transcoding of information from one sensory modality to another. Representation of processes and forms as algorithms and data structures facilitates a fusion of media that I call *intermedia composition*.

Intermedia, as defined by poet Dick Higgins, works across media or fuses them, but it does not couple events in strict correspondence, as happens in data transcoding, light shows, and even in visual music works such as Oskar Fischinger’s films. Unlike *gesamtkunstwerk*, intermedia does not simply bring different arts together. Rather, it creates a hybrid artform, where events in different media may be complementary, overlapped, or independent and where their relationships are part of the compositional process. This process may arise from a poetics, characterized by metaphor, or from a representation of compositional structures as abstract forms.

Intermedia composition, whether arising from poetics or from abstract structures, permits new forms of art and of collaboration. Throughout my career, I have worked with musicians, actors, and composers. In the 1980s I developed a generative system, IgnoTheory, for producing tiling patterns and graphs that offered symbolic interpretations (as a dysfunctional fortuneteller, Ignotus the Mage) and formal structures. Music derived from IgnoTheory was used for performances with Taller de Acción Teatral (*Moebius Paths*, 1980; *Travesias*, 1982) and with young composers associated with Fonos (*Domain*, 1983) in Spain in the 1980s. After I moved to Chicago in 1983, performances as Ignotus led to interactive installations remixing the voices and faces of participants (*Pond/ & II*, 1997, 2001, 2006). Other installations emphasized social interaction (*Orai/Kalos*, 2002-2004).

In the 1990s conversations with composer Stephen Dembski led to a wonderful collaboration on a VR world using IgnoTheory constructs (*Fools Paradise I & II*, 2004, 2018). Our work provided a model for intermedia collaboration, which involves creating a pool of structural and symbolic forms that artists share while free to elaborate their own concepts. My latest intermedia collaboration, with composer Christopher Walczak (*Campos/ Temporales*, 2022), began with structures relating signals to maps, one-dimensional sequences in time to two-dimensional sequences in space (images) and time (animation). Working with live musicians has also become a fruitful discipline and is the way I want to move forward with my work, circumstances permitting.

### From Algorithms and Data Structures to Symbolic Meaning

I use algorithmic processes to generate my intermedia compositions and installations. I also use them to generate visual work, primarily archival pigment prints. My work has been associated with the Algorists, and with glitch art, the one concerned with algorithms and aesthetics, the other with data structures and error.

Through the many processes I have explored I have built a pattern-maker’s workshop, a *Wunderkammer* of forms. Forms accrue meaning through use and social interaction. Ultimately, I am concerned with how meaning emerges from form and how multi-sensorial imagination can evoke symbolic knowledge. Intermedia, algorithmic art and glitch are all processes where our fragmentary and conflicted consciousness devises new ways of understanding the world and new forms of communication. Aesthetic beauty may be the superficial result, but the buried kinships of things and people are the true aspiration of my work.