

immerse!

Sound Light Space

An excerpt from the book & podcast series.

by Charlie Morrow

Prequel

My view as a composer and sound artist is shaped by my intentional recall of experiences and sounds from pre-birth. From my mid-twenties, from roughly 1967 forward, I have been driven to spend years in the process of remembering back to that transitional moment.

I do it by identifying key sensory experiences, going back in memory time, milestone by milestone. The thrashing and squeezing of the birth passage is my starting point. As one experience is remembered, I mull it over and over until I can trust that it is true. Then I look back further into my memory for another milestone

and so on. So as one perceptual bubble dissolves, another one becomes visible. Driven to return to earlier and earlier moments in my life, I get there and there is my earliest being. It is a place both large and small, somewhere nondimensional. It's an experience of listening to a world beyond my mother's body. There I am, timelessly floating from one moment to the next, more a sensory body than a physical body. I am part of a vibrating mass, my mother's internal organs – already listening, observing and remembering.

From that earliest awareness, my recollections of being can then be traced forward. In recollection, I then began to float forward in time and everything began to make sense. This recollection turned into forward time travel, recalling the growing of my body and receptors. First came an awareness of sound followed by an awareness of bursts of light in what I would come to know as my eyes. Until birth, I am attached to my mother's umbilical cord and her chemistry and emotions. Now, even as an old guy, I think that I can at will mentally return to points in my life to re-experience them, a moment of *deja vu* of sorts, my first experience-bubble in essence. What follows is the story of many more experience-bubbles.

Acknowledgements

The book and podcast, *immerse!*, is a collection of interviews and writings about immersive experience components and design from prehistory to the future. It is a story about the bandwidth of human perception from a pre-birth, birth and media point of view. It is the story of making observations in that bandwidth and of breaking the boundaries, going beyond. My work proceeded one project with its team of collaborators at a time. The timeline is the conceptual spine of this book. I could not have made this professional and reflective journey alone. It unfolded in collaborations that opened doors.

I dedicate *immerse!* to Michael Gerzon (1945-1996), the Einstein of immersive sound. I deeply thank Gerzon's friends Gilad Keren, co-founder of Waves software, and Bob Stuart, for sharing memories, insights and introductions to Gerzon's writings, poetry, friends, and colleagues.

Each *immerse!* collaborator was asked two questions: 1. How did you first become aware of immersivity? 2. What is the timeline of connections to your current work in immersivity? Their words, their works, and their timelines are represented here in this book and in the accompanying podcasts. I tie these trajectories to my own and incorporate our works into a big picture of trajectories of human innovations, the timelines from spark to spark.

I am inspired by the poems, compilations, and commentary of poet Jerome Rothenberg, especially in his *Technicians of the Sacred* as well as in his many gatherings through to the present. Rothenberg is my mentor and collaborator in lifetimes of projects that include co-creations and performances. Many are New Wilderness Foundation productions with our extended artist community: concerts, events, broadcasts and publications, including the Audiographics sound art cassettes, that are still available on Bandcamp, and *New Wilderness Letter, Journal of Poetry – New/Old Explorations in Sound & Language Arts*. In the first interview presented here, Rothenberg shares his vision of *omnipoetics*, which harmonizes with my own views of immersivity and inclusivity. He voices the immersion of the solitary writer creating a world to be shared with readers – crossing time and space. He refers both to the macro and to the micro.

I am indebted to Maija-Leena Remes, my partner and collaborator, for making exemplary projects together with me. She brings critical and creative thinking and tickles the funny bone. I am also energized by collaborator Rip Hayman, captain of sound and sea, co-publisher of *EAR Magazine*. Explorer and comic, Rip has worked with me on decades of immersive events, broadcasts, publications and installations. His EAR Inn, located in lower Manhattan, has over time provided a home for much merriment. And without peer, Sean McCann of Recital has brought clarity, new light, and new audiences to my work through his publishing, A&R skills, art direction and audio mastery.

But, above all, I am aided and abetted by editor-producer bart plantenga in bringing *immerse!* to its present form as a book-and-podcast project. His keen ear and devotion to the imagination can be felt flowing through the entire project. He edited, scored and mixed all of the interviews with

my sounds and music and those of my collaborators. He worked with Sean McCann on the book design and layout. In the Reflections section, he offers his personal immersive story, “Immerz,” as well as his concept of the completed assembly of our *immerse!* project.

The entire project called *immerse!* was sparked by astrophysicist-educator KaChun Yu’s essay, *A Brief History of Immersive Experiences Before Computers*. It has been updated and is published here along with the text of my interview with Yu for our podcast series. I have expanded upon his timeline of immersive experiences, going backward to possible beginnings and forward to those of our community of collaborators. I have here followed Yu’s timeline approach, lists of events and connections in descriptions of each innovator’s first immersive experience and of what led up to their present practice. The timelines of the collaborators’ paths nicely map out our parallel journeys.

KaChun Yu and Dan Neafus, founders of www.imersa.org, brought me into the dome theater world in the early 2000s, welcoming my immersive sound project into the Gates Planetarium at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. Somewhat later, Thomas Kraupe, director of the Hamburg (Germany) Planetarium kindly saw a role for me as chair of the Immersive Sound Committee at the International Planetarium Society.

We are all immersed. From prehistory to now, successive experience-bubbles driven by technologies have become shared realities. Speech and music. Fire. Writing and painting. Electricity. Recording. Electronic transmissions. Digitalization. Virtualization.

Here in the present, both sound and word can be of greater and greater service in our pursuit of harmony with sound, light, and space, both natural and man-made.

**To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.
• William Blake**



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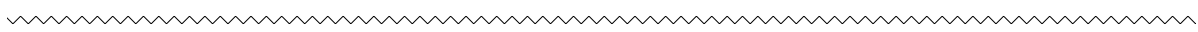
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Interviewees: Jerry Rothenberg (poet, anthologist), Rip Hayman (composer, sound artist, publisher), Gideon D’Arcangelo (technology architect, experience designer), Paco Underhill (sociologist, entrepreneur, author), Annea Lockwood (composer, sound artist), Karin Bacon (event designer, producer, costumer), Jaron Lanier (musician, virtual worlds innovator, author), Steve McCaffery (poet of word, sound, image, performance), Gerd Stern (poet, art technology pioneer), Michael Gerzon RIP (inventor, sound recordist, poet), David Toop (musician, author, teacher), Christopher Wangro (event producer, musical instrument builder), Stephen Vitiello (musician, sound artist, curator), Diana Deutsch (music psychologist, teacher), Stephanie Morrow (marketing strategist) Gunnar Wille (artist, author, teacher), anthropologist, arctic specialist), Brian Katz (acoustician), Paul Geluso (sound engineer, author, teacher), Dan Neafus (planetarium technologist, organizer), KaChun Yu (astrophysicist, planetarium technologist, author), Martyn Ware (activist musician, sound artist, podcaster), Michael Schumacher (musician, sound artist, curator), Pamela Z (composer, sound artist), Miya Misaoka (composer, sound artist, teacher), Tim Ventimiglia (architect, museum designer), Monica Bolles (sound engineer, sound artist), Alan Nursall (science media reporter, planetarium director), Jamie O’Boyle (author, cultural literacy consultant, venue design), Margaret J King (author, cultural literacy consultant), Robin Sip (fulldome show producer, founder of Mirage3D) Barry Threw (curator, producer of new media) Henry Stewart (immersive media producer), Ian McClennan (designer of planetariums), Louis-Philippe St Arnault (artist-technologist) Thomas Kraupe (planetarium director, curator), Luc Courchesne (artist-technologist), Anne Stenros (activist architect, designer), Carlos Casas (multimedia artist-technologist), Stewart Bird (multimedia artist-technologist), Pierre Brand (sound engineer, planetarium shows), Travis Price (architect, author, speaker), Micky Remann (producer, immersive experience designer), Annie Mitchell (light artist), Jenny Woo (director of immersivity at IBM), Martine-Nicole Rojina (sound engineer, artist technologist), Sjoerd Postema (event & co-living producer, virtual world developer), Philippe Grottsch (physicist, oceans analyst), William Fitzhugh (anthropologist, arctic specialist) & Phil Niblock (composer, filmmaker, director of Experimental Intermedia).

Immerz: The Plunge Into Always

bart plantenga author, visualist, DJ

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Upcoming immerse! Sound Light Space Podcasts. Twice monthly.

LISTEN Here: <https://immersesoundlightspace.podbean.com/>

- **Annea Lockwood:** New Zealand-born American composer and academic musician taught electronic music at Vassar College. She's known for her explorations of natural acoustic sounds and environments, in works ranging from sound art and installations, through text-sound and performance art to concert music. She has also recorded Fluxus-inspired pieces involving burning or drowning pianos. Her CDs include: *Thousand Year Dreaming/Floating World*, *World Rhythms*, *A Sound Map of the Hudson River*, *Tiger Balm* ...
- **David Toop** is a musician and author of *Ocean of Sound* and *Haunted Weather* and has followed the path of shamanism and sonic experience. He is a respected improviser and thinks of all his creative activity as improvisation.
- **Miya Misaoka** is a composer, performer, sound artist, and director of Columbia University's sound art program, an explorer of inner and outer sound worlds.

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