

# Synaesthetic Performance In The Club Scene

Annet Dekker  
Netherlands Media Art Institute,  
Montevideo/Time Based Arts Amsterdam  
+31 (0)20 6237101  
annet@montevideo.nl

## Introduction

“Let's pretend there is a way of getting through into it somehow, Kitty. Let's pretend the glass has gone all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through--“ She was up on the chimneypiece while she said this, though she hardly knew how she had got there. And certainly the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist.”

from: *Alice Trough the Looking Glass*, by Lewis Carroll (1871)

In our daily life our various senses are under constant assault. Visitors in shops, cafes and even on the street get overwhelmed with beats accompanied by flickering lights, video and digital imagery, all of them trying to keep up with the music. These developments are most prominent in the club scene where the sounds merge with light, images, smoke and even smell. After the popularity of the Disc-Jockey (DJ) the Video-Jockey (VJ) entered the club scene in the late '80s. The term VJ was introduced in the mid-'80s by television broadcaster MTV. At first it was used for the presenters of their programs, but soon the term was taken over by the people in the club scene for the person in charge of the flow of images that accompanied the music. At first sight the work of a VJ looks similar to that of a video artist. Using the same equipment, it has a similar aesthetics. But in contrast to most video artists the VJ only operates live. In this way VJ shows are related to performance art, especially the live creation of an experience where different senses are being triggered. Most VJ's see themselves having a direct link with the rise of House music in the mid-'80s and the popularity of video clips. In this paper I will show that the now common combination of DJ's and VJ's in clubs is a recent form of synaesthetic performance.

Synaesthesia is the recreation of a sensation through sounds, scents, the visual, the physical the word and all other sensations. The British theoretic and critic Josephine Machon describes the synaesthetics as a performance in which different artistic forms, principles and techniques are brought together in a way to evoke an emotional response by the viewer.<sup>i</sup> Looking at the history of the live image it will become clear that the DJ/VJ performance is another way to try to get people through Alice's Looking Glass into another world. To fully understand the importance of the intertwining of sound and image in clubs, I want to draw attention to the fact that the DJ/VJ show has its roots in performance art and therefore deserves special attention when describing and analysing conceptions of contemporary performance art. Because the differences among VJ's are

enormous nowadays, I will focus on performances that make a physical and psychological connection with the public through the synthesizing of various media like sound, image, smoke, smell, etc. These synaesthetic performances can be seen as the first attempts to create a virtual reality outside the confinements of the CAVE (Cave Automatic Virtual Environment)<sup>ii</sup> or specially designed suits, in spaces in which the participation of the public is crucial to the success of a performance.

Before looking at contemporary practices I will briefly go into the history of the live image and its connection to sound, followed by the circumstances that lead to the introduction of the VJ.

## 1. From miracle plays to magic lanterns

The first experiments trying to transmit sensations to a public can be found in the early days of art and theatre history. As soon as the clergy recognized the value of the image that would educate and influence their public, churches were being painted and people were led into a world of wonder. Outside people were treated to plays that could last for days while being performed simultaneously on different stages. The camera obscura was one of the first devices that presented imagery without religious meaning. Although it was Aristotle who first recognized the possibilities of the machine, the camera obscura was not actually developed until the end of the Renaissance. At first it was used as a drawing device to see the world in perspective, but soon it was also used as an instrument for artistic and miraculous events. Special rooms were built to let people see and wonder at the miracles of life.

Also from the official arts like painting people tried to impress the viewer. Renaissance painters used mathematical rules of perspective, through which they created endless spaces. Painters from the Baroque surpassed these rules and created a benevolence and density of imagery and narration, which were nevertheless best visible from one single point of view. The work of the Panorama painters at the end of the 18th century was a breakpoint in art history. For the first time, details in a painting did not aim for one central focus point, but they were rearranged and held together by the whole horizon. The Panorama painting caused for a democratic way of looking in which the viewer decided what their focus was. The goal of the Panorama painters was to create an image that reflected nature and reality as close as possible. The illusion of an active experience of space was used to give the viewer the sense of being in two places at the same time, that of the painting and of the real space. This idea is similar to that of artists building on concepts for a CAVE environment or VJ performance. Another comparison with the CAVE and VJ performances is the narration of multiple stories in one image. This density of narration, which according to

theorist Lev Manovich was already visible among Dutch landscape painters from the 17th century, can also be found in the work of today's VJ. By accumulating and changing the images multiple storylines are created in which the viewer can choose its own path.

When the first boom of the Panorama passed, the Diorama caused for a new up rise. In 1822 the Frenchman Jacques Louis Mandé Daguerre was the first to present the diorama. Large screens were placed in front of an audience of 300 people on which every fifteen minutes the image changed. During the changes of the setting the public marvelled at the use of smoke-, clouding and light effects accompanied by music. The first synaesthetic performance was a fact. A real use of staging of lights and effects came with the invention of the magic lantern. The first lanterns had already been invented in the 17th century. And although they struck the audience, who thought of it as sheer magic, they came to their true development in the next century. This was mainly due to the heavy and impractical size of the apparatus. With technical improvements the lantern became more transportable and therefore their popularity grew. The lantern projected images on smoke or mirrors that gave a feeling of transparency and immateriality. At the turn of the 19th century this led to a whole series of especially ghostly performances. Through the rest of the century special buildings were built where different performances were held. Accompanied by music, these performances can also be seen as among the first cinematic experiences. To improve the illusion different lenses were developed for the lantern which made it possible to project overlapping images that gave the impression of movement.iii

There were also different approaches with regard to connecting music and light. In 1725 Louis Bernard Castel writes about a 'clavier oculair'. This ocular harpsichord (later better known as color organ) would consist of two colored discs that were connected to a harpsichord. Castel investigated the analogies between light and sound and with this organ he wanted to paint with sound. Although he never managed to build his organ, various people picked up on his writings. Castel based his findings on observations in the field of physics, but the psychological and philosophical implications form the essence of his research: "Not in dreams, but especially in the state of dizziness preceding sleep, or after listening to music for hours, do I feel the correspondence between colors, sounds and scents. It seems as if they all rise mysteriously from the same ray of light and, subsequently, reunify in an amazing concert. The scent of deep red carnations above all has a magical effect on me".iv He wanted to use the organ as a means to paint with light. Although he never actually managed to build his organ, to this day his writings are still popular with many artists that are looking for ways to (scientifically) make a composition by using light. Descriptions of the sort as described above are also reminiscent of the effects of psychedelic drugs that were in use during the Romantic area and later in the second half of the 20th century.

Another important influence in the history of synaesthetic performance was the German opera composer Richard Wagner. In 1849 Wagner proposed the idea of a Gesamtkunstwerk in his article 'The Art-work of the Future'. Wagner believed that the future of music, music theatre and all the arts lay in embracing the Gesamtkunstwerk, a fusion of the arts. He used his operas as

a vehicle to create an immersive experience in which, as Wagner wrote, "the spectator transplants himself upon the stage, by means of all his visual and aural faculties." A few years later he opened his own theatre, the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, Germany, where he reinvented the conventions of the opera.v

It is not surprising that although the inventions were very influential, in their time they were regarded as outside the scope of Art. They were not regarded as representing reality in a true sense, but were merely deceiving and suggesting the preternatural. Only in Romanticism were they appreciated and seen as works of art in which you could dream and be overwhelmed. In the late Renaissance they had merely been seen as experiments and tools for artists and scientists. When the Realists took over in the early 19th century they emphasized the technical aspect to dismiss the inventions. The technological influence made them unreliable. Works of art had to be true depictions of nature and could not be touched by artificial instruments. In the minds of a lot of people the mechanization would lead to a decline in cultural values. Nonetheless their popularity grew.

## 2. New means, different ways

The technological progress that started in the 19th century could not be stopped. Eventually the far-reaching possibilities of print, photography, film and radio transmission led to new ways of thinking. The technological improvements and the more ready access to different and new media influenced the making, perception and distribution of art. New things were possible because new electronic developments were taking place. Different environments were created through new interpretations of light, image, sound and motion. Through technological inventions people could communicate more easily and express and exchange ideas on a broader scale. Old traditions were questioned and society itself came under interrogation. In the early 20th century all the insights of new ideals and developments came to an explosion. At the same time the rise of a mass economy started.

Counteractions showed themselves in the ideas of the Dadaists, the Symbolists, the Futurists and the Surrealists. These groups reacted against the massification of a changed society and especially against the institutionalization of art. Although these groups had different goals and used different means, an overlapping concern was to open the eyes of the public by showing them a different world in which art was merged with daily life. In some cases the audience was urged to take the setting into their own hands, by asking them directly to intervene in the performance or installation. All these efforts were intended to create a sensation and to make contact with the public through different means. Most of the undertakings failed; instead of getting away from the art world, the art world welcomed the new approaches and the efforts to shock were seen as refreshing new ideas.

After the Second World War actions to create a synthesis between performer and public were nevertheless intensified. In the minds of John Cage and Allan Kaprow the public itself had to participate in the performance to get the most intense experience. In destroying theatrical conventions they anticipated the synaesthesia similar to discotheques and the experience of

participating in mass spectacles. These happenings, performances or installations were new forms of art where the participation of the viewer was seen as a necessity. An important aspect of these Happenings was their role outside the art world. The word Happening was chosen by Kaprow to underscore the role of these performances and to avoid any connotation with the art world. According to some new media theorists, it was this transformation in art that prepared the ground for the interactive computer installations that appeared in the 1980s. Moreover I would suggest they also set the ground for DJ/VJ performance that also came into development in the 1980s.

### 3. The influence of popular culture

With the introduction of television and video artists increasingly became concerned with bringing art and technology together instead of art and life. What were called 'Intermedia' events took the place of Happenings. The Intermedia performance is described as drawing from both theatre and cinema. By walking into the performance environment the audience would set off detailed film images and activate overlapping time projectors, thus changing the imagery and the time frame of the performance. Although this caused for a lot of suspense and excitement and was more than anything a sensory experience, it didn't call for a total illusion where the viewer would be absorbed into a different world. These Intermedia events can be seen as variations on the early dioramas, magic lantern shows and color organs. The performances were still linked to political ideals. Artists tried to wake people up, moving them from their couches and showing them what else could be done with the existing and growing mass culture.

Andy Warhol was one of the first artists to bridge the gap between popular culture and art. In 1966 he created the show 'The Exploding Plastic Inevitable' (EPI) to introduce the music of The Velvet Underground & Nico in the United States. This show can be seen as the first step towards what we now call a DJ/VJ performance. During the whole show there was a synaesthesia of music, image, color and light. The cinematic homage to the EPI by Ronald Nameth managed to capture the experience in which form and content became synonymous. The film was made in the tradition of synaesthetic cinema, a tradition in which one is made aware of the process and effects of perception; that is the phenomenon of experience itself. Synaesthetic films are made out of different layers and fragments in such a way that one image is continually transforming into other images. Images are being orchestrated in such a way that new realities come out of them. This process was later used by many VJ's. In Warhol's own 'club' called the 'Factory' parties were given where performers and public mixed, the one being indistinguishable from the other. These parties and other newly opened discotheques were linked to the psychedelic movement that also started in the 1960s.

The psychedelic movement is mostly known for its experiments with hallucinogens, but more important, it also helped to shape a real 'youth culture'. At the time immense changes were taking place in America's culture and political field. The civil rights battles, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the rising anger over the war in Vietnam caused a lot of distress. Especially the younger generation was turning against the system. The younger

generation was beginning to create for itself a sense of identity and empowerment that was unprecedented. They were trying to make their own lives and rules, different from the conventions of the mainstream culture. Drugs were becoming a means to escape, their hallucinatory effects were creating a new consciousness far away from the conservative society they lived in. Pop and rock music played an important role in the liberation process. The music was largely inspired by mind-expanding drugs like LSD and marijuana. The psychedelic rock movement continued to expand during the '70s, but it lost most of its hard core after the early '70s when rock groups toned their music and lifestyles down. It returned however in the late '80s and '90s when a new sound - techno and electronic music - was performed at what came to be called House Parties.<sup>vi</sup> Once again the music was intensified by the taking of a new drug, MDMA or Ecstasy.

With the arrival of cheaper equipment which facilitated the production of visuals, next to the DJ there was also a VJ showing abstract and surreal visuals that reacted to or fused together with the beat. The origins of the House movement lay in a belief, a belief in the self: "It was a personal liberating experience with a slow, primal beat and rhythm. 'My house is your house and your house is mine.'<sup>vii</sup> House culture was family."<sup>vii</sup> Although the House Movement was very similar to the psychedelic movement in the '60s, life itself had changed, influencing the meaning of these new 'raves'. Taken over by the commercial world, the intentions and feeling of the parties changed. As the parties in the '60s were driven by an inner ideology to broaden self-consciousness, the raves in the '90s were a reaction to a deteriorating society. The raves were a place to get rid of the anger and frustrations of everyday life.

### 4. The shift to music

Going back to my initial argument that the DJ/VJ act is a recent form of synaesthetic performance, I would like to describe a few examples of Dutch DJ/VJ shows that have been very influential in the last years. By exploring these 'new' performances the resemblance with earlier examples will become clear. These performances are not only similar to the ones before, moreover they also seem to follow a similar path. Not long after the first real discotheques opened up in the '70s experiments with light and visuals appeared. People used liquid-slides, disco balls and light projections on smoke to give the audience new sensations. Some of these experiments were linked to the music, but most of the time they functioned as decorations. These first experiments are very similar to the early history of the live image as described above. As the clergy did hundreds of years ago, now again people tried to lure an audience into their world by affording them new sensations. It was not until the late '80s however that an intense relationship between sound and image occurred. This was mainly due to the availability of cheaper equipment like projectors, video cameras and players and the arrival of affordable computer technology.

The fusion of image and music coincided with the arrival of new sounds. 1977 marks a time in history when a new technological tool - the synthesizer - was introduced, and becomes paradigmatic for this shift in attention. In that year bands and singers from different musical backgrounds began making use of

this new technology. It was a German group, Kraftwerk, that bridged the gap between the rock music of the '60s and '70s and electronic dance music of the '80s. With regard to synaesthetic performance the music was more than ever calling the shots from that moment on. The year 1981 marks another important step that was of importance for the intertwining of sound and image and the future of video. Music television station MTV (followed a few years later by others like TMF and the BOX) started non-stop broadcasting of music-video clips. These clips were intended to boost sales on the music charts. In the meantime the clips also provided the singer or band with a more profound image. By overturning traditional conventions regarding imagery a new visual language was created which reached thousands of people at the same time. With the coming of digital video editing this became even more apparent. Regardless of all that can and has been said about the advantages, disadvantages and meaning of this new phenomenon, the fact remains that it did lead to a stronger connection between music and visuals. A number of VJ's today still say they were inspired by all the visual manipulations and effects in music-video clips.

Around 1985 the House movement and House music arrived in The Netherlands. At first it was only popular with a small group of people and it mostly got played in clubs in the west of Holland. After the second Summer of Love in 1988 things changed and the new Acid House became widely accepted and very popular. The spirit of the House scene was - as elsewhere - one of togetherness, happiness and peace. This was reflected in the staging of the events. The House Parties were large gatherings of people who came to enjoy the music, there was no band or anything to watch, just a pile of electronics with a DJ mixing other people's music. To give the parties a more profound look, a face or even an icon, the VJ came into play and complemented the music with visuals.

## 5. Pioneers of the Dutch scene

It is hard to determine who was the first VJ in The Netherlands to introduce visuals on the dance floor. If it is primarily about visuals being presented in a new context, the club Mazzo was one of the first places to experiment with imagery. Beginning at Mazzo in 1979, experimental filmmaker and VJ Peter Rubin is credited with being the world's first live-mixing VJ. He developed the art form while trying to relate the new possibilities of technological visualization to young music-oriented cultures in a humanistic, socially oriented manner. It was not until the introduction of House music however that visuals become aesthetically synonymous with the music. Different people started around the same time in different places, but all had the same goal: trying to create a real-time continuity between image and sound. The aesthetics, goals and material they used were as varied as the people producing them. A few examples:

Micha Klein, one of the VJ's who is also known outside of The Netherlands, likes to create a synaesthesia of beauty. Making all the visuals by himself on the computer, Klein wants to create positive icons that are uplifting and will "give you a boost and a positive vibe for the whole day."<sup>viii</sup> With all the bouncing colors and whirling forms, his work reflects nostalgia for the psychedelic movement in the '60s when everything was about

love, peace and happiness. Most of the animations he makes are based on themes which are formulated together with a DJ. The decision about which image to show when is taken during the evening and depends on the music and the mood of the audience. Although Klein is often described as being too superficial and commercial, his work has been of great importance for both VJ performance and digital photography.

Geert Mul and Titus van Eck, initiators of Cut Up and D.U.M.B. (Dutch United Media Base) had different ideas. The two organizations were set up with different goals. Cut Up was the more commercial and D.U.M.B. became a platform for artists from various backgrounds. The members focused on the creation of specific environments to try to bridge the gap between the audience, the music and the visuals. By hanging cameras and microphones in the space and mixing those sounds and images with their own they tried to interact with the public. These experiments recalled the Intermedia events of the '60s. But instead of showing people the effects of mass media or the uses of multimedia D.U.M.B. tried to change existing formulas of presentation. They wanted to break out of the club scene to develop the VJ potential into non-traditional ways of presentation. According to D.U.M.B., removing a traditional context and showing different things each time would enhance the experience. "It's all about creating a different sensation".<sup>ix</sup> The visuals of Cut Up reflected a similar approach. By using existing images from films, documentaries or news items they deconstructed information given by the media, to create a different meaning.

Another VJ who has been very influential is Gerald van der Kaap. Apart from being labelled the Dutch Godfather of VJ, Kaap has also been regarded as the VJ artist who introduced the image in a different way. With his background in art he tried to create a total environment where the music, the space, the light and the visuals intertwined. He is one of the few VJ's who is not afraid to turn off the screens or to mix his own sounds through the music. First and foremost he is looking for ways to surprise the audience and to shake them up once they seem to be losing their attention.

This showing of new realities was also the starting point for Jaap Drupsteen. Drupsteen's main interest lay in the visualization of music. He tried to let people see what they were hearing. He would not merely follow the music, but through a multi-layering of video images he orchestrated the visuals thereby allowing the images to materialize in as many layers as the ensemble itself. The composition would change with the rhythm of the music: forms, colors and perspectives changed, sometimes gradually, other times abruptly. This way he revealed music as it is - a comprehensive structure that develops over time. Drupsteen's work clearly reflects the ideals of a Gesamtkunstwerk as Wagner sought its performance in the 19th century.

## 6. The second half of the '90s

By the early '90s House music had become more than just something to dance to. It was the gateway to collective euphoria, a huge shared secret and a massive in-joke in comprehensible to the mainstream. A whole generation was in on it, meeting at

motorway service stations in the middle of the night to follow coded directions to illicit parties and dance until dawn. The police and local government officials hunted down these outbreak of outlaw spirit that spurred hundreds of thousands of people to break into warehouses and set up sound systems in remote fields. But in the mid-'90s by then the more generally termed 'dance music' retreated back into the clubs, opting for constraint and control, and in the process created its first generation gap.

The art of the VJ of the second half of the '90s had become as diverse as the different styles in music. In the second half of the '90s everybody seemed to work with digital technology and everyone could be a DJ or VJ. The emphasis on the space and the context of the presentation, things that were still important to the early VJ's, was replaced by large screens that hung around the dance floor. This stands in sharp contrast to the Happenings and Intermedia events, when visuals were projected onto the people, which caused the audience to connect with each other. The background of the VJ had also changed. The pioneers of the Dutch scene were artists who had been trained in art academies. The second generation of VJ's formed collectives with people from different traditions. Some had their roots in computer programming while others in graphic design, film directing or sound. These collectives were the perfect example of the cross-disciplinary collaborations that found their heyday in the mid-'90s.

Just as all of the dominant music genres (trip-hop, drum and base, big beat, ambient, etc.) depended heavily on technological progress, many VJ's now started editing their material live on a computer which could change and recombine the material in many ways. Jeroen Hofs (Eboman) was one of the first to make full use of the possibilities of the computer. By using samples of rock, house, funk hip-hop and jazz and mixing these together to connect them into a new sound, he created the ultimate form of cross-over. He applied the same principle to video. Like the sound, the images were in stereo; the result was a total immersion in the story. He also connected sensors to his arms which would allow him to trigger sounds and images with the movements of his body.

A collective that used found footage and other film material to tell their story was Captain Video. The collective consisted of a 3D animator, editor, graphic designer, director and a multimedia designer. When they just started they primarily used graphics to impress the audience; the faster and more colorful their images were the better. Noticing that this strategy was not very satisfying, they returned to the use of pre-recorded video fragments. Out of this existing material they made new stories, sometimes commenting on the mass media other times to spread a message. Their way of working very much reflected the '90s postmodern culture that was reworking, recombining and analyzing already existing media material to make sense of the world. Coming into the new century Captain Video moved to creating live movies out of existing material that developed together with the music of the DJ., showing new ways of telling a story. It is an approach that can also be found in experimental cinema, video- and computer games and internet.

Pips:lab is a collective that use the computer to combine and connect different disciplines in a new way. One of their main

goals is interaction with the public. They are not satisfied with mere projections of visuals that react to the music or vice versa. They work in the tradition of John Cage and Alan Kaprow in a way that the success of the performance depends on the participation of the audience. But whereas during the Happenings the audience was merely seen as material, Pips:lab gives the viewer tools to interact directly with the performance. The player has to perform actions to move the visuals and the narration of the 'play' forward. The public gets to decide in the end what it does or does not want to see. It is not surprising that a new incentive has tried to involve the public. Developments in computer based media have transformed the viewer into an active user. An image became something a user would actively go into, zooming in or clicking on individual parts. The image was no longer static but had become interactive. The performances of Pips:lab remind us of theatre plays where the staging and technique orchestrate the viewer's attention over time. But instead of being spectators, the public have now become participants.

With the beginning of the 21st century a renewed interest in the olfactory surfaced. The VJ collective Barkode wants to create a synaesthetic performance by triggering the subconscious. Their show is a succession of encounters, chance meetings of words, images and sounds. Many transparent layers overlap, leaving the viewer lost in time, space and emotion. But as time passes, more story lines develop, which make it even more unclear: does the spectator find the plots or are the consecutive images and sounds leading up to something? Barkode describes their shows as 'confusing constructivism', inspired by the subconscious. By using smell they augment the atmosphere; pleasant smells heighten the experience, and by employing foul odours a feeling of disgust is triggered. Their performances are a postmodern version of the experiments done in the Romantic area and in Sensurround films of the early 20th century, when smell cards were given to the audience to accompany the sensations in the film.

The potential of the Internet is used by a group of VJ's who call themselves Snowcrash. Through live streaming Internet connections, participating musicians and VJ's world-wide are connected to a live stage. Their play is mixed with the music on the stage and the visual input is projected onto various screens. Special developed electronics assure that everything is synchronized. To still be able to unravel the different cultures and to grasp the global effect they ask the participants to comment on specific topics, ranging from political statements to examples from their popular culture. The musical and visual battle is played out on stage and can also be followed live on the internet in the confines of the living room. Snowcrash exemplifies how the VJ experience of today is not just a fusing of different disciplines, but is also an expansion of national borders.

## 7. Moving into the world

Up till now I have mainly concentrated on the Dutch VJ scene. This seems a logical step as Club Mazzo in Amsterdam in 1978 was one of the first clubs in the world that facilitate for and believed in the impact of using visuals during their nightly dance parties. The problem most clubs had was hardware. Existing

hardware was too expensive to buy and was only used by advertising agencies, national broadcasters and government agencies. After developing their own video mixing tool, Mazzo embarked on a unique cultural path in the history of clubbing. Their goal was to develop new theories and practices regarding visuals, music and social ideology (i.e. how to best communicate social messages within the rapidly changing technological environment). At the heart of these experiments was the presumption that the power and scope of sound and image in perfect balance could best meet the needs of these latest challenges. One of the primary goals of the Mazzo experiment was to establish an environment wherein one would not run away from reality but, rather, get the inspiration and renewed mindset to improve the conditions that exist within reality. The underlying concept rested on fact that the video mix was not conceived as an extension from the world of music or art but, rather, was developed as a form of progressive social communication. However, as culture has become more and more commercialised, the social messaging which permeated the initial period of video mixing has been replaced in great part by the flashings of the individual VJ.

As I said before the art of VJ has gone into many different directions, both content wise as well as form but the experience also crossed many borders. Every club in the world has its own VJ or team of VJ's, it will go too far to mention the differences or similarities between the various countries or people. What is striking however is the influence of the technological advances. These developments have offered every country of the world new and profound possibilities for intercommunication and interactivity. As a result of this progress, an absolutely vast number of dance clubs have sprung up in every conceivable corner of our planet. In one form or another (primarily due to the Internet), every one of these countless number of clubs is also directly connected to another, meaning that there is, in fact, an established connection between every club in the world. Such a structure is unprecedented in history. To an extraordinary degree, the predominant social philosophy within the youth of these clubs transcends the individual socio/political directions of their respective governments, allowing for the possibility of an enormous and unified global voice for social reform.

Striking in this respect is the influence of the so-called 2nd and 3rd world countries over the 1st world countries. This is not so much by means of new visual languages or graphics that are being shown, but more importantly a new vibe seems to surface. Coming from a very different background and cultural status the attitude is very different from the established 1st world VJ's. This also effects the audience watching the performance. The resulting performances carry a very special, underlying electricity that is simply not present in 1st world performances. An experience that is totally invisible. But totally visible. Hopefully this will provide a significant, positive influence and renewed inspiration.

## 8. The future of visuals and sound

By going through history I have tried to shed light onto the phenomenon of VJ culture. Every now and then I also briefly hinted to the influence of VJ on other disciplines, but foremost I

tried to show the history or the origins of the synaesthetic performance. When looking at recent trends in VJ it would not be an understatement to say that VJ indeed is a new form of synaesthetic performance, a form that might develop in interesting ways. At times it may be thought that history is merely repeating itself, the only difference being a new medium. But as I have pointed out, one thing has changed dramatically and calls for new research and interest in this area: the audience is not composed of a few insiders anymore, but the whole synaesthetic experience is massified. Although there is no telling where the VJ performance will lead us, already questions arise which call for further investigation: What is the influence of all this media circuitry on existing disciplines, on the position of the performer and of the audience? What will happen with the influence of performers from non-Western countries?

When looking at the speed of technological implementation, activation in the development of a new, positive, contemporary consciousness seems necessary if we ever want to step out of an ever-expanding Looking Glass. One important area to focus on is the club scene, as it has always been the environment where youth culture gathers together most consistently and in its most significant numbers.

Thanks to: Peter Rubin, Amsterdam

More information on VJ <http://www.visualsensations.nl>

## References

- [1] Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (eds.), *The Art of Performance. A Critical Anthology* (New York, E.P.Dutton, Inc. 1984)
- [2] Jim Cook, 'Shallow happiness never lasts', in: *Flash Art*, October 1999
- [3] Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (eds.), *Illuminating Video. An Essential Guide to Video Art* (New York, Aperature Foundation, 1990)
- [4] Lynn Hershman, *Clicking In. Hot links to a Digital Culture* (Seattle, Bay Press, 1996)
- [5] *Localizer 1.0 The Techno House Book* (Berlin, die Gestalten Verlag, 1995)
- [6] *Localizer 1.3 Icons* (Berlin, die Gestalten Verlag, 1998)
- [7] Josephine Machon, (Syn)aesthetics and Disturbance - A Preliminary Overview, in: *Body Space & Technology Journal* (Brunel University, vol.1, no.2, 2001)
- [8] Laurent Mannoni, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow. Archaeology of the Cinema* (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2000)
- [9] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Boston, MIT Press, 2001)
- [10] Jacqueline Oskamp, 'Veejays. Beeldende kunst of behang?', in: *THD 02*, zomer 1997

[11] Helen Paris, (Re)Confirming the Conventions - An Ontology of the Olfactory, in: *Body Space & Technology Journal* (Brunel University, vol.1, no.2, 2001)

[12] Peter Shapiro (ed.), *Modulations A History of Electronic Music: Throbbing Words on Sound* (New York, D.A.P., 2000)

[13] Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York, E.P.Dutton & Co., Inc., 1970)

[14] Andrea Zapp and Martin Rieser (eds.), *New Screen Media. Cinema/Art/Narrative* (London, British Film Industry Publishing, 2002)

---

<sup>i</sup> Josephine Machon, '(Syn)aesthetics and Disturbance – A Preliminary Overview', in: *Body Space & Technology Journal* (Brunel University, vol.1, no.2, 2001)

<sup>ii</sup> The CAVE creates a three-dimensional virtual reality that allows users to walk around in whatever environment they choose. Images are projected onto three walls and the floor, completely surrounding the user's visual field. With special 3-D glasses that track where the user is looking, it is possible to actually walk around and behind images.

<sup>iii</sup> Although the magic lantern has always been regarded as the precursor of the cinematic experience, it has even more similarities with VJ culture in our time. This is especially true for the early experiments where the magical and illusionary effects were very important.

<sup>iv</sup> Frans Evers, "Transcript of the Permanent Flux lecture", in: *Permanent Flux* (De Balie, Amsterdam, 1999)

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.artmuseum.net/w2vr/contents.html>

<sup>vi</sup> Even though the name 'House' was originally adopted from the legendary 'warehouse' in Chicago, the 'Spirit of House' developed in the '80s due to the more frequent use of private houses for parties. This situation arose because either they could not get past the bouncers in established clubs, and/or these clubs were too expensive. Source: *Localizer 1.0 The Techno House Book* (Gestalten Verlag, Berlin, 1995)

<sup>vii</sup> Peter Rubin, "Chromapark and Beyond", in: *Localizer 1.0*

<sup>viii</sup> Jim Cook, "Shallow happiness never lasts", in: *Flash Art*, October 1999

<sup>ix</sup> Jacqueline Oskamp, "Veejays. Beeldende kunst of behang?", in: *THD 02*, summer 1997