

VJ Culture: A Phenomenon in History, Presentation, and Perception

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Foreword

“VJ Culture: a Phenomenon in History, Presentation, and Perception” is a report based on a series of interviews that I held in the summer and fall of 2004 with thirteen VJs in the Netherlands. As a result of a previously published investigation into the history of VJing,ⁱ I was curious about the opinions of VJs themselves. How do they see their own practice? The thirteen VJs with whom I spoke were for me a good reflection of VJ culture in the Netherlands as it had developed in the late 1980s and the 1990s. I made a conscious choice to talk with people who had been present at the inception of VJing as well as those who came later, and finally with a couple who have only been active the last few years. Furthermore, in making my selection I was attentive to the diversity in approach, presentation, and content. Though some VJs whom I interviewed absolutely do not want to call themselves VJs, I have still chosen to make use of this general term in this article. One of my research questions directs itself exactly to this issue: What is a VJ? How can we describe and interpret a VJ performance? Nevertheless, in this research I do not want to give a firm definition of the term VJ or to sketch a well-defined frame of reference within which the VJ is active. It is exactly the variability and liveliness which characterize VJing that I want to emphasize. With this article I want above all to let the voices of the VJs be heard and through them to describe a phenomenon that has its own history, presentation and perception - a phenomenon that is still developing rapidly and in its lack of definition holds many possibilities for experiment and inspiration.

1 History: The Origin of the VJⁱⁱ

“In my opinion it was the cave dwellers who made little rabbit-like figures on the wall by the campfire, and others were beating on drums who you could say were the DJs of their time. So actually VJing came into being around three thousand years ago.” Keez Duyvis, Pips:Lab

After the popularity of the Disc Jockey (DJ), at the end of the 1980s the Video Jockey (VJ) made its entry in discotheques and clubs. The term Video Jockey (VJ) was popularized by cable channel MTV. The term had been used for the first time ten years earlier by the staff of the Peppermint Lounge, a popular dance club in New York. With this term, the performers wanted to distinguish themselves from the “stuffy” Video Artists who were part of the art and culture scene in New York. MTV founder Bob Pittman took the term over to introduce his program hosts.

1.1 House

For many VJs House music, which broke through in the Netherlands at the end of the 1980s, forms the basis and the starting point of the breakthrough of the club VJ. The roots of House music lay in the belief in a self-awareness and community feeling, Peter Rubin: It was a personal liberating experience with a slow, primal beat and rhythm. ‘My house is your house and your house is mine.’ House culture was family. On the face of it, it seemed almost necessary to provide images with the music. Electronic music was not interesting enough to look at; there was no band, singer or video clip to entertain the public. But for many VJs, VJing was more than decoration, and it had a lot more to do with the creation of a feeling of fellowship, Daniëlle Kwaaitaal: It came from love for each other, love for music. (...) It was almost a religious experience the first time, with stroboscope. You saw nothing at all, everything vibrated. it was a physical experience.

That ecstasy and the whole physical thing, the surrender, all those people together. There is no comparison any more with what it is now.

1.2 Social & political

The optimism and sometimes almost naive feeling can also be accounted for by the social and political circumstances. **Micha Klein:** We came out of the darkness of the Cold War, and suddenly there was a feeling of optimism. And with new technology and a new sound, we could step into a new era. The Berlin Wall had fallen, apartheid had been abolished. It was a time of unbelievable optimism and creativity, and at the same time there was a lot of cooperation between the various artistic disciplines. Along with the many positive social and political developments, less positive developments such as the student protest at Tiananmen Square in Beijing caused the house and techno scene to spread itself around the world as a social movement in the form of events such as the Love Parade and May Day. At the beginning of the 1990s, this process accelerated through the arrival of the internet and improved means of communication. **Peter Rubin:** One of the most revolutionary aspects of House culture was that they were the first generation to truly begin to actively organize like-minded communities throughout the world via cyberspace. Up until 1989/1990, House culture looked at the computer freaks as weird nerds with big eyeglasses, who did nothing but sit in front of their screens all day. The 'nerds' thought of House culture as 'druggies, dropouts and losers'. Around the turn of the decade, the two finally joined together. Once these two subcultures began working cooperatively, an ever-increasing number of social experiments in cyberspace followed, which laid the foundation for any number of social directions which exist today (message list projects and events, blogging, coordination of international funding and support resources, recognition and communication with third world youth cultures, creating bridges between street culture and traditional art communities, etc. etc. In other words, the identification and coordination of the global House Nation movement.

1.3 New technology

Social events and developments were very important for the formation of House culture, but today's VJ probably would not have come into existence without developments in technology. Although there had been experiments in the 1960s and 1970s with liquid slides and film, it was the availability of cheaper video cameras and the introduction of the beamer that made it possible for VJ performance to assume its present form. **Gerald van der Kaap:** The technology is what got it started. [...] That happened in a very natural way, with hey there is a beam. And then something needed to be done with it. That is also odd the first time, when you have never seen it before.. And then you set about thinking things up. [...] And so that beam has helped with introducing the phenomenon of VJing. After several years, the same equipment brought about a standardization; with it and at the same time, the freedom of the VJ to experiment with the space disappeared. **Geert Mul:** At some point the clubs caught on a bit to how it went with VJs, and they wanted to let the whole thing proceed a little more easily and smoothly. So they bought themselves a mixer and two screens and hung up two projectors themselves, and then that was the equipment and the setup for the VJs. The idea of creating a new space was finished. There simply came to be a standard, and with it, VJing was neatly channeled into the club concept.

1.4 Commercial interests

As the technology became cheaper, the popularity of the VJ and the club rose, and with it also the growing attention of commercial interests for this new trend. The influence of commercial interests created a lot of displeasure among the first generation of VJs. **Daniëlle Kwaaitaal:** There are now so many interests tied up with it, especially economic ones. It has become an autonomous economy; that was not at all the case in the beginning. We were very earnestly searching for a new way of communicating. VJing in the club was a platform. That is how I really saw it too, and that is how it was. All kinds of things were happening. Now it has become pure entertainment for a whole lot of people, above all for young people. It is sad to see the influence of the big brands – the

Nikes, the liquor industry, the cigarettes. A formula has evolved around that entire culture, from dress codes to drinks, it is simply a whole lifestyle. Sometimes it is very sad to see how that kind of an industry has annexed a very pure movement. Young VJs are usually depicted as individualistic and without ideals. The new VJ is one without politics who merely sits at his laptop making pretty pictures and wants to give the audience a good feeling. There is still talk here and there of a new spirit of the times and the opening up of perception, but these are no more than vague ideas. "This was a movement about feeling, about friendship and fun rather than serious thought." ⁱⁱⁱ

1.5 The new message

However, the young generation of VJs sees it differently. Judging by their reactions, there seems to be more a question of a different approach than of indifference. **Elsbeth van Noppen**: Technology is only a means of doing things faster, or more beautifully, or more easily. If there is no content, it will not work even though you may have the most expensive equipment. These two things, content and technology, have to be present in completely equal measure. The message is much more packaged, not in direct images and examples but more as subtle or abstract references. **Lucas van der Velden (Telco Systems)**: In our work, there is a very clear need to shake people awake. We want to pick people up, give them a good shaking, and set them down. But without any obvious finger-pointing or telling them literally what has to be done differently. With this, the younger generation of VJs seems to make use of the advantages of technology and at the same time to have a new visual language at their disposal, a visual language that is not peppered with overt references but is only recognizable for insiders.

In any case, this is not a question of missionary work. The dance floor is seen as that for which it is intended: amusement. **Jeroen Hofs (Eboman)**: First of all, you are in a club with a dance floor; it is fantastic if you can bring across all sorts of messages with subliminal mail, but that is not your main thing. If you want to teach people things, then you have to give a lesson as a guest instructor, write a book, or make a documentary that you present so that people really can concentrate on that intellectual content. **Elsbeth van Noppen**: People come to a club to go out; they have chosen to have a fun evening. This does not mean that all of the images have to have little blue clouds. However, you do have to be aware of where the boundary between political or social messages and entertainment can lie. This is in contrast to the older generation, who really thought that they were able to change things, both inside the club, **Geert Mul**: We thought that the architecture of the club had to be different. We wanted permanent facilities for making the image, through which you would get, for example, large screens on the walls. From within such a setting you could then begin experimenting with image and sound. The DJ and VJ would sit closer to each other, and maybe both would come together in the same person or it would become coupled to the technology. And we actually saw all of this happen in a few years. ...and outside the club, **Daniëlle Kwaaitaal**: My mission was to stimulate the audience one way or another to get them interested in art, by building bridges between gallery, museum and club, but also by using magazines that young people read to tell about what I do, where it can be seen, and why art is important to our society.

2 Definition: What is a VJ?

It is remarkable that the term VJ is still associated with MTV. On *eyecandy*, a well-known VJ mailing list, Stefan G. tells a humorous anecdote: "Funnily enough, when MTV were scouting around for 'presenters' six months or so before they started, they put out a call for VJs to send them demos. Everyone who was a working VJ at the time sent them MAD multilayered mixes, thinking that's what they meant! They had to put out another press release clarifying that they defined VJ as an on-air personality not a visual mixer! Shows how corporations can co-opt & redefine our own terminology, twenty years later even VJs think that the term was invented by MTV..." ^{iv}

Even today, the appellation VJ (Video Jockey) is still a controversial term. VJs who work more outside the club circuit than within it see themselves not as VJs but more as visual performers or visual artists. The term is also considered dated, old-fashioned, and inadequate by those who are active in the clubs, because **Elsbeth van Noppen: these days everyone is VJing**, and with this the diversity in styles has increased enormously. Even within the club scene, the term VJ evokes a negative connotation with the entertainment industry. To set themselves apart from it, more and more other names have been coined: Pixel Jockey, Visual Performer, Video Mix Artist, and Visual Jockey.

But what is a VJ anyway? According to most VJs, the difference between a VJ on TV – MTV, for example – and a VJ in a club is the same as the difference between a radio DJ and a club DJ. **Lucas van der Velden (Telco Systems): VJing is more of a verb for making pictures in a club.** But for some, a VJ is much more than just a club VJ. For them, the most important aspect of VJing is the real-time connection between sound and image. And that can happen in a club, but also in a theater or an exhibition space or during small “happenings.”

2.1 Background

To what extent does the disagreement about the name of the VJ perhaps tie in with the backgrounds of the VJs?

It is striking that many VJs have an art academy background. Although the disciplines they have studied vary from fashion design to interaction design and sculpture, in any case there is artistic knowledge involved. The motivation to mix live images in a club also derives in part from this background. For many VJs it was in fact the only way to show their work after the academy. **Daniëlle Kwaaitaal: We went to VJ at parties and clubs because colleagues of my generation and I knew that we would not get a chance at places like the Stedelijk Museum. I think it is extremely important that as an artist you do become and remain visible somewhere.** Showing your work to as many people as possible is a driving force for nearly every VJ. The excitement of the live moment and the reaction that follows from it is for many VJs much more exciting and more challenging than showing one's work at an exhibition. **Micha Klein: You put yourself very much on the line; you place yourself in a much more vulnerable position as an artist than you would be in working in the art circuit, because if what you do in a club is not any good, you are dealt with immediately and mercilessly.**

2.2 Experiment and technology

In addition to showing their own work, the discovery of new technology and experimentation with it played a major role for the first generation of VJs. The club circuit gave them the possibility to experiment with image, sound, and presentation. **Gerald van der Kaap: My training was the stone age of the media. [...] Everything happened for the first time. Nothing was there yet, so you could simply think up everything yourself. [...] Suddenly there was a beam and something had to happen with it.** This thought contrasts sharply with the way in which many VJs work today. In present-day clubs, almost everything is already set up; the screens and the beamer are hanging and the mixer is ready to go. At the last moment, there is an industrious search for something with which to fill the screens.

For many, access to new equipment and putting it to work for other purposes became the beginning of live VJing. **Geert Mul: I worked in a video studio in Hilversum; that was a rather small studio, but they had all kinds of creative assignments. With these, I earned some money, and I also had access to equipment. It was actually there that I first got the idea to take equipment from the studio to the club. Why shouldn't I be able to play with images with my mixer in another place?** Unfortunately, practical considerations quickly caught up with the VJ; by acquiring beamers and a mixer and

setting up screens, VJing was embedded in a context, and the experimentation could then only take place on the screen itself.

It would be easy to use the backgrounds of the VJs to explain the differences in VJing. Someone with a background in fashion will deal with images and performance in a different way than someone with expertise in making sculpture. However, the differences between the VJs, especially in the beginning, are still unclear. **Jeroen Hofs (Eboman):** In the early 1990s there was an entire culture of people who were experimenting with videotapes and stuff; they were simply artists and nut cases and hobbyists and freaks and researchers and pleasant types. It was a very diverse group of people who you couldn't put a label on. The "problem" was clear; something was happening for the first time in a new space with new equipment. Although they all had the same equipment at their disposal, it was still quite limited, and at the same time, one kept looking for a long time for the ideal presentation. **Geert Mul:** Every time we would look again to see what the best way was to hang things up. And every time was different, because each time we came into a different space, into different clubs and into tents and to festivals, one time big and the next time small, one time with monitors and the next time with projections, one time as big as life and the next time with all kinds of sequences of little images. Starting in the mid-1990s, a change seemed to come about. The clubs created a standard by making their own setup, and the VJs could concentrate on the image. Still it was a few years before one could really make distinctions among VJs.

2.3 Collectives

Starting in the middle of the 1990s, you see that many people begin to work together with each other, often while still at the art academy. Different people with different backgrounds, from filmmakers to computer programmers and graphic designers, worked together on concepts with which to fill a dance evening. **Elsbeth van Noppen:** My education was in fashion design at the art academy, and Martin had a background in film and TV technology. That was a really fun combination. And because neither of us had had the standard audiovisual training, we approached VJing from a very different angle. We effortlessly made a crossover with music, with poetry, with images, and with sound. We organized our own evenings where we showed everyone our stuff, but where others could come with their stuff too. Just as in the arts, in the middle of the 1990s the VJ world too was characterized by the formation of collectives. Curiosity about new technologies and the need to show things to an audience continue to dominate VJ culture. The styles of VJing had meanwhile become as diverse as the different musical trends that replaced each other at a rapid pace.

3 Presentation

VJ styles

By the mid-90s, for some time House music had no longer been the only musical style that was VJed to; from trip-hop, drum and bass, big beat to ambient, everything was used for mixing images to the music. Within the VJ world, this led to a variety of styles, each with its own approach. **Kees Veling (Captain Video):** You have the love, the Micha Klein corner, little flowers and thingies. You have people who are really fond of 3D. Of course you have the "ass-kissers," people who especially make use of the name of the DJ, the name of the club, or the trademark of the sponsor. You have the genuine Rietveld art, which is very much about the artist, what he is busy with, and how he makes art. You have the people who kick on techno. Then you have the rambam people who bang along very figuratively. While the collectives are made up of people from different disciplines, it is striking that the separation between VJ styles looms very large. **Elsbeth van Noppen:** Actually, you have very many different kinds of VJs, but they all have their own scene where they show their stuff, and their own party style and their own musical style.

3.1 Form language

Most VJs do start their career in the same manner, causing as many images as possible to move as quickly as possible in as little time as possible. **Kees Veling (Captain Video):** When we were just beginning, we sat on top of the music and we tried to catch every break. That is awfully tiring and often counterproductive as well. You have already gone through all of your tapes in the first thirty minutes, and the rest of the evening you ask yourself what else you can do. Later the realization begins to sink in that this approach does not work, and the focus shifts to one's own identity and approach. From that moment, the differences between VJs become increasingly clearly visible. One VJ tries to get to the essence of the medium, such as Telco Systems, for example, **Lucas van der Velden (Telco Systems):** We make sound and image with the computer as our main instrument. We started at the beginning. Zeroes and ones, blocks and beeps, and from there we develop a kind of language. Our work is a kind of stripping of all possibilities in order to come to a kind of notion of essential composition. Another emphasizes the cinematic aspects, **Elsbeth van Noppen:** What we did in the beginning was very much based on a script. We started a project by making recordings, organizing a casting session, and shooting. We had everything completely planned, and all those separate things were built up into a VJ set. Or use is made of live-streaming internet connections to bring together different VJs from all over the world on a number of stages. The images are mixed with music on the stage and projected on large screens. Specially developed technology sees to it that the whole thing runs synchronously. The musical and visual battle is fought out on a stage and can also be followed live on the internet in the shelter of one's own living room. VJ shows like this demonstrate that present-day VJ performance not only is a blending of different disciplines, but it also transcends national boundaries. In addition, there is also the low-tech approach in which the audience has a central place, for example with Pips:Lab. Although Pips:Lab makes use of advanced and self-built technology, their performances are much more about the interaction with the audience. By working with actors and live camera feeds, they make interactive theater in a club environment: **Stije Hallema (Pips:Lab):** Very often we think up something for that evening. What we very often do is that we do not take along any image material, but we make image material on the spot. We take along actors, and they form the images.

The development of an individual style and identity has brought about many different VJ performances. Many VJs left the clubs to perform in cafés, theaters, cinemas and museums or galleries. Today we see the VJ turn up everywhere, and if the public wants to, it can find a different style nearly every evening: from graphic, found footage, television images, computer generated images, to slides. Not only is there a difference between VJs more at the level of content, but the presentation and the location of the performance also bring about enormous differences between VJs.

3.2 Space

As we said earlier, the first VJs were convinced that the club would lose its rock 'n roll structure and would be open to new experiences of image and sound. **Geert Mul:** We wanted to take the hierarchy out of the club. No longer would everything have to go to one central point. We wanted to shift attention to the middle, where the people could move around it. The image and the sound also had to come from four sides, with the audience around it or inside of it. But soon enough it turned out that commercial considerations had the upper hand, and the choice was made for a standard solution. Still many VJs end up choosing their own way, and by working together or organizing things themselves they provide different manners of presentation. Nearly all VJs consider the spatial arrangement and presentation of their work very important, but the motivation is not always the same. Some of them want to present different narrative lines by using multiple screens. By letting stories run in parallel or sequentially, the course of the story changes. Others cooperate as much as possible with the lighting crew to be able to create an atmosphere for the whole evening. Or an attempt is made to

create as spacious an effect as possible by having the image spread over a number of large screens in the space. These examples all have the same goal: to try to get people into another, new world. And then the rule "the bigger the better" almost always prevails. Arno Coenen: Size does matter, I would almost want to say.

A number of VJs clearly differentiate between "club work," where use is made of the facilities already present, and their own "live installations." In the latter case, they take complete control over the space. Projection surfaces of their own design then provide a totally different experience in which the space of the club becomes invisible. The most important reason for this is not so much to present a new world, but rather the choice is based on the image itself. Lucas van der Velden (Telco Systems): Every time you try to take control of the context as much as possible, so that it suits the work. On the one hand, you create work specifically for a certain space. But on the other hand, you also try to mold the space as much as possible to your will. The manner of projecting and presenting is totally at the service of one's own images. One searches for the optimal presentation for the images to be made. Olga Mink (Oxygen): Sometimes I distribute multiple screens around the space, chopping up the image into pieces. By doing this you also get a shift in time and movement in the space. My manner of editing and the way of projecting give the total image an extra dimension.

Surprisingly enough, the last group of VJs differs not only in their presentation, but their formal language too clearly differs from that of their club colleagues. Although the work that they present in a club displays similarities to their live installation images, the difference with respect to the other club VJs is great. The image material of the club VJ is characterized by found footage, self-made video images, and 3D animations. The overall image is recognizable, and now and then it is interrupted by graphic elements. On the other hand, the images of the other group are much more abstract, computer generated, and especially non-figurative. Though the backgrounds of VJs gave little reason to categorize them, the manner of presentation and the formal language seem to divide the camp in two: a division between club VJs and live installation VJs.

It is also not surprising that the latter group in particular avoid calling themselves VJs, but for now see themselves chiefly as artists. This connects with the previous remark that within the club circuit as well people encounter more and more resistance against the appellation VJ.

3.3 Collaboration of image and sound

In the above discussion, the relationship between the VJ and the DJ has already come up several times: the term VJ was popularized by the music cable channel MTV; House music provided the breakthrough of the VJ; and experimentation with image, sound and space was given free rein, especially in the beginning. But how important is the DJ for the VJ? In answering this question, we quickly encounter the distinction between a one-off performance somewhere in a club, a steady residency in a club, and cooperative participation in specific projects or assignments. Although in the first case most VJs try to follow the DJ with their images, there is a dominant opinion that the VJ quickly becomes subordinated to the sound. Daniëlle Kwaaitaal: I notice that as VJ you are actually always a subordinate. You can never break in on one of the DJ's sets. Because, A, they simply do not accept it, and B, it is not tolerated by the audience. This is a remarkable statement, because this is in fact seen differently from the side of the music: "Ever since MTV came along, the video clip is an essential part of the marketing strategy of a CD. The image became at least as important as the music. Sometimes the image even threatened to overshadow the music. [...] Techno has driven the image of the performer and of his creation almost completely to the background and replaced it with a visual show."^v Although this perhaps says more about the superficiality of the music, there is also a clear reference to the growing impact of the image. With increasing frequency one even hears about the musicality of the images, something that particularly stands out in the sample culture.

For most VJs, you can say that there is good collaboration when VJs work somewhere for a longer period of time. Only then can something be built up within which a lot of interchange takes place. **Gerald van der Kaap**: In the Roxy, we did it all together. We really were like a Boy Scout group in which everyone cooperated. The decor crew, lighting, and DJs, but we also knew each other well. They weren't anonymous people who you had once heard of. So it was logical to collaborate with each other. Later there were also other parties with DJs from abroad, and they were surprised when I mixed my sounds through the music. Collaboration turned out to be characteristic of people who know each other. You have to trust each other. That they know that you aren't going to make a mess of it, but make it better. Starting in the mid-1990s, the collective in which people from different disciplines contribute to a total concept reflects this method of working.

Some VJs want to work only in a collective because the effect of the dialog is more important than individual merit. They see VJing as a way of creating a platform from which it is possible to work with other disciplines and especially to experiment with them. The collaboration of image and sound grows naturally toward each other. Still, many VJs become frustrated by the commercialization of the clubs through which freedom is becoming limited, and also by the inflexible attitude of many DJs. **Lucas van der Velden (Telco Systems)**: For a time VJing was an interesting platform to easily bring out new kinds of images. You didn't get them on television, so it was an easy means to show a lot quickly, and to learn from it, to get practice with all the possibilities, to discover what can and cannot be done with sound. But as soon as you want to direct the sound with your images, nearly everyone who makes the sound drops out. So it is very much a one way street. The solution is being sought in smaller assignments in which close cooperation develops. **Geert Mul**: In the collaboration between Gideon, Koot, and Sedi, we really developed things all together. We tried out a lot of things and made installations and performances in which image, sound, and environment very much fused together, just as our collaboration did. I don't know any more who thought up what; it was a coming together of processes. These experimental performances take place less and less often in a club and much more in other smaller settings, at festivals and in movie theaters or galleries. In this, both VJ and DJ are clearly looking for a different focus and new experiments.

3.4 Real-time mixing and processing

A recurring question that comes up when one looks at the collaboration between VJ and DJ is to what extent the real-time interplay of image and sound is truly live. At many performances, it is often not obvious to the audience whether there is simply a tape playing or whether images are being mixed and/or processed live in response to the music. In answering this question, it is important to know what we actually mean by "live." One of the first artistic devices of the VJ began with experimental film. Super-8 movies were projected on the white walls of the clubs, sometimes intermixed with light experiments and liquid slides. The films had already been recorded ahead of time and were shown from time to time in the course of the evening. The liquid slides were also made ahead of time, but their mobile fluids produced live movements that formed various patterns by themselves. Later as well, with the arrival of video and projectors, not much changed. The prerecorded tapes were for the most part mixed live and possibly enhanced with a number of effects. Playing with live effects was facilitated with the arrival of the mixer with which images could easily be faded in and out or processed in other ways. This reinforced the live effect. **Micha Klein**: The Panasonic MX50 became a very important VJ mixer. It has a lot of sliders, with which it can be played like an instrument. With this, you have a very active mixing style; by using faders, keyers, and other effects, you try to create a rhythm. That is also the whole idea of dynamic mixing. [...] You also see immediately whether VJing is happening live or not, and if people don't see it, then it isn't being done properly. Many VJs fart around with tapes in a style that goes much too slowly or is not in time with the music. If I am working with a DJ and it is

all spot on and the whole rhythm is pulsating, then the live aspect does stand out. It is simply a question of skillfully handling your mixer and being a part of the whole, and then people see that.

In the course of the 1990s, faster computers make another way of working possible. Sound and image are generated in the computer and are totally harmonized with each other. Often there is another visual language involved here, so-called "abstract synthetic cinema."^{vi} Such performances are best described as research into the mutual influence of digital visual and auditory languages. As, for example, with Telco Systems, **Gideon Kiers**: Everything that we make is generated in real time. The process of making it is often playing and sometimes thought out ahead of time. Sometimes we think up a plan ahead of time: this is where we want to go. But along the way we always wander off the path and come out at a different spot. We are programming all day long, and in the meantime we look at what is coming out. It doesn't matter that much whether it is image or sound. Because of the computer, the live aspect becomes increasingly invisible. If different people are sitting behind the screens, it is not clear who is doing what: a computer, a VJ, a DJ? The differences between all these elements, that were once so visible, are swept away, and that which remains is the final result, whether it is live or not.

VJs themselves consider the live aspect to be logical. The comparison with the live DJ or with putting on a CD is easily made. Working live is not just logical; it is also what it is all about, **Arno Coenen**: The best thing of all is to be in a live situation. That's what everyone wants who is in a band. And that is what is pre-eminently lacking in an exhibition setting. Flexibility and the element of surprise are what cause many VJs to prefer live work to making DVDs and films. **Elsbeth van Noppen**: What is fun about VJing is that it is not a DVD that is finished. You can always add on to it every time with samples. And every time it is also a completely different story again; you can spread that story out over two hours or you put it into twenty minutes; you are actually flexible. But in a live situation, it almost never comes down to a tightly knit synergy between image and sound. **Daniëlle Kwaaitaal**: When you make a film in which you collaborate with the same DJ or with the same producer and lay sound under the image, you get much more of the effect that the two disciplines multiply and reinforce each other. That doesn't happen all that often when you work live. It only happens when you rehearse well and make good agreements about it. The length of the evening also plays an important role in this. **Lucas van der Velden (Telco Systems)**: It is very difficult to make something nice that lasts for six or eight hours. The time span in VJing is often very long. In the eight hours that you are busy, there are maybe ten minutes where it really works. And the rest is all just a bit too late, or it doesn't click. This is one of the reasons why the choice is made increasingly often for shorter performances in which the attention of the audience is requested for a short span of time. **Elsbeth van Noppen**: Shooting through umpteen samples at a rapid pace – that's not it any more as far as I am concerned. There has to be a lot more integrity and content in the image, and there can also be a lot more points of rest built into the performance.

In addition to shorter performances in which the live quality would stand out, DJs also opt for an obvious communication with the audience in order to establish the live quality of the evening. **Keez Duyvis (Pips:Lab)**: For us the audience itself is the proof that we are performing live. Very often you ask someone to come up on the stage, or you film someone from the audience and make a loop with it; that is then the proof for the audience that it is live and not recorded beforehand. It is very amusing that we build in the proof now and then. In cases like this, the live communication with the audience is in fact more important than showing the live interaction between image and sound.

4 Perception

Meanwhile it is no longer possible to imagine club culture without the VJ. No one is surprised any more by the moving images that appear at the edge of the dance floor, on the stage, or on the wall. But what is actually the role of the audience? In what way do they play a role in the whole phenomenon?

4.1 Audience

Although all VJs consider the presence of the audience important, their opinions about interaction with the audience vary. **Jeroen Hofs (Eboman):** The interaction with the audience has been for me the reason to use dance stages, because people there are open in a certain way to interaction: they are already dancing to the beat; they are already involved with what is going on in the hall. In a movie theater, which in fact is a very obvious place to show visuals, the audience is very passive. In a club, you get a reaction much more quickly. The interaction with the audience determines to a great extent the VJ's setup and approach. Once the audience is playing a crucial role, one deviates from the fixed screen structure and experiments with specific setups and direct communication with the audience. For example, by means of decision points in which the audience can indicate its preference by pressing a button, or by giving the audience the possibility to chat with the person on the other side in streaming internet sessions. Such performances are increasingly similar to short or long theater performances in which the stage takes a backseat role and the participation of the public comes to the foreground. Another method frequently used to involve the audience is to record people from multiple camera angles and to mix these live with the VJ's images. This passive interaction provides a more direct connection with the VJ's narrative.

The influence of the image on the public can be clearly seen by the VJ, **Daniëlle Kwaaitaal:** For example, you can influence moods quite a lot. If you show dark, somber images on the screen or very aggressive images, then you do see that people react to them. And if you work a lot with slow motion, then you notice that the audience calms down. But most VJs believe that the power of the image must not be overestimated. **Kees Veling (Captain Video):** Of course, people come for the music and to dance and not to look at images. With this in mind, now and then there is even an attempt to tease the audience. **Kees Veling (Captain Video):** Our first residency was in Hotel Arena. Before we came there, it was a rock temple. When we were invited, everything had to become House. However, half of the audience could come only to Arena because there weren't any other clubs in East Amsterdam, and they hated us and the DJs and everything that had to do with us. So we literally got letters sent to us there saying "if we want to watch television, we can do that at home". And we consciously teased the audience there. Teasing the audience is done especially to show people something different than what they are accustomed to. **Eric Noorman (Snowcrash):** What is fun is to give to the audience something unexpected, making something happen that they don't expect. For others, the audience is especially a motivation to show one's own work and to hear right away what people think of it. In this, interaction with the audience is not directly sought after. **Olga Mink (Oxygen):** When I myself do my thing as VJ, then what you get to see is the image that I have made and what I want to show.

Whether or not the interaction is directly sought after, all VJs want their work to get full attention. Because of this, it is important to most VJs that they be clearly visible. Although it is often thought that VJs are of secondary importance, it is important to VJs as a part of the total concept that the audience sees what they are doing, not so much to stand in the spotlight themselves as to let people see who is doing what. **Arno Coenen:** The pleasure comes first of all from making the animation, the video, and the material. This is then shown off during an evening. In theory, I would not mind standing next to the lighting man, rather than next to the DJ. As long as I can still see it. It is about my work and not because I am standing there waving my beard. But for people in the hall, it is in fact cool if they can see who is doing it; then they can come to you and say something about it.

4.2 Documentation and registration

VJs are increasingly often making their own DVDs, on the one hand to make a record of their work and document it, on the other hand in order to emphasize the collaboration with the DJ.

Research into the documentation of live events is still in its infancy. Since time immemorial, an attempt has been made in the theater world to make a record of live happenings on the stage. Thanks to the central position of the stage, the registration of a theater piece is reasonable easy to make. Making use of different camera angles, a picture was given of what took place on the stage. The only problem afterward was whether to edit the recorded images and to what extent. Making a registration of live VJ/DJ performances is much more complex because there is no fixed point. At the same time, a performance consists of different elements that are difficult to influence because they are controlled by different people who are reacting to each other in a live situation: lighting, projectors, film and video images, sound, and active audience participation. But the most difficult question is: what has to be recorded?

Within the issue of conservation and digitalization of items of cultural heritage and making them available to the public, attention is given primarily to "traditional" cultural artifacts (within museums, archives, libraries, etc.). A scientific consensus is also growing with respect to the preservation of such "static" art collections and cultural heritage articles, with increasingly clear agreements about "good practice" in matters of conservation and display.^{vii} This is however not yet the case for recent examples of present-day art which exhibit an inconstant character, such as live performances and the growing share of "digitally born" artworks (electronic media art). The digital, inconstant, and time-based character of these arts brings about a new problem with registration and documentation. Scientific research is still in its infancy, and the first pilot projects within the arts and cultural sector have only just begun a first phase.^{viii} However there has recently been attention from within the VJ scene for the registration and documentation of its own performances. The cause of this is primarily the appearance of the DVD.

In general, most VJs save their images on hard disks and on DVDs. These are the means with which the source material of their VJ sets is saved. Recording the mix with the music is a step further, and for many VJs, it often means extra work and difficulty. **Kees Veling (Captain Video):** The choice is always: you have four VHS decks, and if you want to record a tape, you have to offer up a VHS deck to do it, one that you then cannot use for the performance. In addition, it is often already such a problem to connect all the equipment, and then just to get a static-free line for the audio is so difficult. It's true that doing so provides insight into the interaction between image and sound, but the translation of the live aspect, the spatial work, to another medium is still invisible. In particular, getting the "experience" across continues to be a difficult problem. **Gideon Kiers (Telco Systems):** You can make a recording of a performance and then later you play it back from a DVD. That is a totally different experience. [...] It is very difficult to show that one work, which was specifically made for a certain context, in another context, to let it have the same impact or to bring across the same kind of experience. That is actually nearly impossible to do.

In order to get a clear insight into the possibilities of documenting and recording VJ performances, it is important to look at a number of things. One of the first questions is: for what purpose is the recording to be made? Recording for an advertisement for a future event demands another implementation than for art historical research or cultural criticism. **Geert Mul:** Capturing a performance in its entirety is only useful if you want to do it exactly the same way the next time, or someone else does. However, as reference material for an art historical investigation or for another cultural dissertation, a decent summary of fifteen minutes is more than enough. Research into existing recording

models for multimedia installations can offer a solution for short impressions. However, a solution for audience participation and for capturing the experience is generally lacking.

Many VJs make use of two methods to capture their performances. In one of these, images from the evening are overlaid afterwards in a dynamic editing style. With this method, they try to represent the dynamic of the evening as well as possible. In the other method, they opt for a shorter, more static impression, in which images are laid down next to each other, linearly and sometimes chronologically, often provided with a separate sound track or the sound of the evening itself. In addition, VJs are increasingly often bringing out their own "video clips" in collaboration with a DJ.^{ix} These videos, often referred to as Visual Music, are brought out by VJs themselves, but recently are being published by special labels as well.^x With recordings and sales of VJ material, a discussion about copyrights has suddenly come up within the VJ world.

4.3 Copyright and copyleft

In the beginning, VJing was especially noted for its method of using samples. Old movies, television images, and found footage images were given a new life by the VJ. **Kees Veling (Captain Video):** In that respect, we were awfully ruthless. Simply unsparingly ripping off everything that you think is nice. But for a number of VJs, using someone else's material also has a political connotation, **Jeroen Hofs (Eboman):** Sampling is really a medium for me, because I think it is simply very important that you do not make anything more yourself these days. In this time in which there already is so much, that you don't make something more yourself, and also that copyright as a concept becomes totally reset. Or an aesthetic one, **Stije Hallema (Pips:Lab):** I think that you get bombarded with so many images, the megasize billboards on buildings. You can't escape it any more. So you are allowed to strike back, or you even have to. You have a kind of code of honor. You don't take an image that is really beautiful in its own right, but on the contrary, something that is not so inherently beautiful in order to make something beautiful from it. The boundary between ripping off images and making use of existing images is clear to VJs. **Geert Mul:** If you use work by another VJ, then you are taking something from someone who has already made it to show in a club. That is something different than suddenly showing the nicest scene of *Soldier of Orange* in a club; then everyone does know that in using it you aren't pretending that you made that film. That is where the boundary lies for me between ripping something off and drawing inspiration. Using existing material meaningfully is thus a requirement for reuse.

However, when it comes down to releasing one's own material, that has been distributed via DVD or internet for example, one is more reserved. **Daniëlle Kwaaitaal:** With respect to content I don't have so very much of a problem with it. I would find it surprising though if someone cuts my material, or does something with it, in a way that surprised me. But if it is put on as a kind of background thingie in a club, without having done something with it, and they are earning their money with it, then I think: something here doesn't make sense. [...] By coincidence I was in Antwerp, in Club d'Antwerp, and to my surprise I see a DVD that I made passing by over all the screens, just like that. You know that things like this happen, but still I thought for a moment "How do I deal with this? Is this really supposed to happen? Is this really why I have made this?".

It is primarily the younger generation of VJs who would be just as glad to scrap the whole copyright theme. **Lucas van der Velden (Telco Systems):** Copyright is for me very much an archaic idea. Nobody I know ever talks about copyrights any more. [...] The whole idea of copyrights that is based on paying for a single unique item has simply totally disappeared. It just doesn't exist any more. Increasingly often, they even put their own material on the internet so that others can make use of it. **Olga Mink (Oxygen):** There are clips of mine on internet that you can download. Some of them I do make use of and others I've never used. And sometimes I see them again, when I'm traveling abroad or on internet, especially being used by beginning VJs. I think that's really quite nice. It's primarily making the images that is interesting for me, and if someone wants to

do something with them later, great! This ties in with the ideas from classical music traditions, for example, where each other's themes and concepts were subsequently used to create new works. The influence of the computer and the DVD plays a particularly significant role in the rejection of copyrights. Daniëlle Kwaaitaal: It is simply the nature of the medium. If you bring things out on labels, then you simply know that there is a risk that it will be used somewhere, and that maybe in the end you are going to make yourself a bit redundant because of it. Few VJs are concerned about the latter, Geert Mul: I can hardly imagine that you would go to the trouble; these days you can also simply download video software and then you are also ready to go, but still nobody does that. In the end, everyone wants to be unique themselves. Experimentation with images, either their own or someone else's, is what most VJs want to occupy themselves with. In the end, criteria of quality for VJs are coupled to the art of making images themselves or of mixing them. Simply copying does not fit in. "VJs who make their own material themselves are one up on the rest. There are only a couple of VJs who are really good at mixing fragments of existing material. They select and combine images in such a way that a truly new coherence and narrative comes out. This is something different from a VJ who works hit-or-miss with MTV images or the umpteenth 'twin tower explosions'. If you only get to see images like that, you end up immediately in a numb and weary atmosphere, just as though you were sitting at home on the couch in front of the TV. If you are in a club, you want to experience something new, something unfamiliar, a feeling of ecstasy or solidarity."^{xi}

4.4 VJ = Art

As discussed above, many VJs have a background in the arts, but do VJs see their own work as art? Micha Klein: Within the academies as well as within the official art world, there was considerable resistance against computers, but also against VJing and against art that stepped outside of the familiar frames of reference. And, as is always the case in the arts, from a traditional viewpoint things are seen less positively. [...] I simply embraced it as a new platform: a new way of renewing art. The optimism with which the first VJs saw opportunities for a new art form to come into being was very great. They saw themselves as pioneers of a new artistic movement and reacted against conventional artistic views. Within the established art world, there was little space for experimentation, so one went in search of other exhibition venues. Geert Mul: The time that we were working in the clubs was a very interesting time; many more developments were taking place there than in the visual arts at the same time. In spite of the resistance with respect to the established art scene, there were also attempts specifically to interest young people in forms of artistic expression. Daniëlle Kwaaitaal: With my work in clubs, I want to stimulate the audience one way or another to get them interested in art. By building bridges between gallery, museum, and club, and also by using magazines that young people read to tell about what I do, where it can be seen, and why art is important to our society. [...] On the other hand I have also wanted to show the art world that in some cases VJing can be seen as an autonomous art form, that art comes into being in different places, and that the awareness of art and culture also can come into being in places where one comes to be entertained. With the first generation of VJs there seemed to be an exchange, albeit a one-sided one, between different worlds. This is not to say that they automatically see their work as art. Gerald van der Kaap: VJing, as I see it, means trying out everything. And then there are a few really good moments now and then; often you don't even think them up ahead of time. VJing is very intuitive. With technology you can suddenly come up with really surprising things that are sometimes very good and sometimes therefore are art. Not because it is good, but because it hasn't been seen somewhere yet. [...] I myself do work with this from an artistic angle, but not for five hours at one stretch.

The question to what extent VJing is art is much less on the mind of the younger generation of VJs. Arno Coenen: How does it become art then? Do you have to sign up for that somewhere or get the forms stamped? VJing has in fact been an art form for a long time. Within the world of VJing, anything can and does happen. As far as that goes,

it is an outstanding example of a new art form or platform, whatever you want to call it. In particular the innovation in the technology and the new possibilities for expression that go along with it are for VJs good arguments not to harbor doubts about the artistic value of performances. **Jeroen Hofs (Eboman):** Now we are building instruments that you can wear on your body for people who are expressively active, with which you have much more ability to convert your being and your idea and your feeling into an expression to communicate with an audience, or with which you can control image and sound, and that is art.

As stated above, VJs work increasingly often outside the clubs and adapt their work to the environment and location where they work or to which they are invited. It is notable that nearly all VJs are much more likely to see the connection with art in works like these. **Daniëlle Kwaaitaal:** VJing can be art, but I do think that the spin-offs are perhaps actually more interesting and have more potential than VJing in a club. In itself, this supposition is not strange. When showing VJ work and VJ-related work in a static setting, the work must be finished and totally thought out, while a VJ set in a club is constantly in the making because of its intuitive character. It is difficult then to maintain quality for a number of hours.^{xii} **Geert Mul:** VJing is not art, but that is not a qualitative judgment. There are many different kinds of platforms: club, theater, gallery, or museum. I tend to classify things according to the platform where they take place. What matters is the platform on which it actually operates. In general, one can say that VJing has its place within popular culture, and once the work is presented within a traditional artistic setting, the label "art" is accepted more quickly. **Kees Duyvis (Pips:Lab):** One is on the lookout these days for a new artistic movement, and the VJ sort of gets jumped on. I think it is a very good breeding ground for working with images. I also see many people go on from VJing to make video clips or do things in the theater. I think that I more often consider the things that evolve out of it more interesting than the things in the club. You are an entertainer. And that is the difference: art or entertainer.

It is not just the location that causes much VJ work to be labeled as art. Artists are increasingly often making use of software and hardware that is used primarily by VJs. **Geert Mul:** In the visual arts you are now seeing for the first time some experiments by people who are working with MaxMSP for example, with software that comes very much out of the VJ corner. Because of this, the bridge from VJ to art is becoming shorter and shorter. In addition to the use of media software, VJs also take along their way of working into other areas where they work, whether it is film, theater, art, or television. **Kees Veling (Captain Video):** We take along the manner with which we work with images into our other work. For example, we did the design for NOVA. It has four screens in the background. The whole language of those screens was developed in another place, namely in the discotheques. The influence of VJing on existing or different disciplines is increasingly easy to recognize. Both the aesthetics and the formal characteristics of VJing are being taken along in other work. The big difference with respect to live VJing is that there is more thought given to the choices that are made. **Geert Mul:** I now approach elements from my VJ past – such as the relationship between image and sound, architecture and the audience – formally in my work. Thus I give it some thought. For example, I still work with image collections, but I make a choice about where I get them. And I consider very consciously the architecture, the space, and my audience: who are they, why are they coming here, what are they doing? The intuitive character of VJing has shifted to a clearly delineated frame of reference.

On the whole, VJing can be seen as a movement that has gone full circle. At present, VJs are shifting from the domain of popular culture more and more toward that of art, while in the beginning VJs instead turned away from the world of art. The same is true of the equipment; the projectors, video players, and mixers, at first used in the arts and in film, were taken along to the parties and clubs. Now software from the VJ crowd is being used by a number of artists. The circle seems to have closed. However, although the initial negative attitude of museums seems to be disappearing,^{xiii} a solution for exhibiting VJ

work has yet to be found. In looking at and judging VJ work, the art world continues to hold onto existing norms applicable to other art forms. In doing so, it passes over unique characteristics of both the medium and the context within which the work comes into being. "One way of defending mass art [and with it VJ art] is to acknowledge that every era has art forms with their own standards and rules. These standards and rules are no longer applicable to the art of a century later"^{xiv} Transposing VJ work to the museum is impossible and probably undesirable; the live experience and the intention of the work lose all their value. Nevertheless, museums should be able to reproduce a context in order to get deeper insight with it into the background of the images and the performance. In this way, new trends in art can better be elucidated. In addition, it is relevant to ask the question whether a re-adjustment is not required in the discrimination between two categories: on the one hand serious, conceptual, artistic projects, and on the other hand entertaining projects.^{xv}

4.5 Future

Jeroen Hofs (Eboman): When I am 80, and I sit there in my interactive wheelchair and try to do something more, those kids who have grown up then with those sensors and those instruments and that software and who are getting data on different levels: that will become next level art.

Many VJs look forward to the future of VJing with a positive attitude. **Elsbeth van Noppen:** I don't think that VJ culture is going to blow over. On the contrary, I am certain that everyone wants to be stimulated more and more. It is normal these days that there are visuals, and because of this, people will go looking for other things. For example, fragrance is one such thing. It won't be used at every club evening, but it will be used for example at performances where things are more visceral, where you can feel them, see them, smell them. The total experience is going to become increasingly important. The intensity of the stimulation of the various senses will go up, but the expectation of most VJs is that the VJ no longer will fill the entire evening on his own. **Gerald van der Kaap:** I do believe that it is going to be found more in the acts, more concentrated. That you will get real performances that you will go to for the images and sound. The formation of the VJ collectives starting in the mid-1990s seems to point clearly in that direction, as does the emergence of festivals for image and sound, such as Sonic Acts or Photonic, for example. The focus at such festivals is on the collaboration between image and sound and, as was the case at Photonic, the creation of a "total immersive environment" – the Gesamtkunstwerk, the total work of art. With it, the wish of the first VJs seems to disappear from the clubs and to shift to festivals, special locations, and even to (or back to) the theater. **Daniëlle Kwaaitaal:** The idea that we had when we began, the Gesamtkunstwerk, the total synergy between image and sound – that dream, fantasy, or wish is going a bit downhill. Because in a club it often just hangs there like a kind of wallpaper. That is actually very unfortunate. The theater is a place where I think that the crossover between the various disciplines and media takes place. There you have an actor in dialogue with someone who makes images. These are places where I let myself be inspired, not in a discotheque any more. I go to the discotheque to dance for a while, to drink a glass of champagne, and to meet friends. As far as I am concerned, the entire cultural connotation of a club is completely gone. It seems inevitable that the VJ will not disappear, considering the visual culture in which we live. However, the innovations within VJing as a movement will most likely take place on other platforms in the future. Just as the first generation of artists went in search of a place and a platform of their own in order to exhibit their art, VJs are now looking for a way out of the established clubs in order to be able to experiment further. One way is that of art, public space, and the festivals, another leads toward the commercial world of video clips, advertising, and television. A third is toward areas that we do not yet identify.

5 Conclusion

With "VJ Culture: A Phenomenon in History, Presentation, and Perception", an attempt has been made to answer a number of questions about VJ culture. The aim was to find out in which way the work of a VJ can be described, characterized and critiqued. This raised the following questions: Can the work of the VJ be formulated within criteria of quality? Can the various elements of a performance – image, sound, performer, audience, and environment – be looked at separate from each other? Does the VJ performance fit into an artistic frame of reference; are there predecessors or movements within the realm of art that worked with image and sound in a comparable way?^{xvi} To what extent do social factors play a role? And what is the distinction between VJing and other (artistic) disciplines, and does the VJ's work influence existing disciplines?

It seems easiest to say that the present-day VJ came about thanks to technology, but looking back at the history of the phenomenon it turns out that other factors also played a role in the coming into existence of the VJ. In the history of art, one can point to clear predecessors within both experimental film and video art that, just like the VJ, had a merging of image and sound in mind. At the same time, artists made use of performances outside of the established art world both in the 1920s and 1930s (e.g. Dadaists, Futurists) and in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Happenings, Intermedia Events) in an attempt to involve the audience actively in the shows.^{xvii} Thus, VJing can be traced back to a number of disciplines. This makes it more difficult to answer the question whether VJing is art. The loss of identifiability within a specific discourse can lead to confusion about the concept "quality" and with it the question of art. On the other hand, the lack of definition offers us the possibility of breathing new life into old questions. Moreover, because the discourse is still fresh, insights acquired elsewhere can offer us space for reinterpretation and a new point of view instead of repeating clichés. In setting up criteria of quality ahead of time from within existing disciplines, there is a danger that developments will be excluded that later turn out to be valuable. Before specifying criteria of quality, we first need more information about the variety of VJs: are there categories that can be determined, or can certain aspects be distinguished. As history has shown us, it is also necessary to do research into related areas in order to be able to estimate the value of VJing. This involves developing both direct formal characteristics as well as contextual knowledge, for example gaining insight into the history of the music/DJ culture, dance culture, and popular culture. In the end, the VJ is indifferent; whether or not his work is art depends on the context within which the work is presented. However, in order to truly arrive at a discourse it is necessary for VJs to become conscious of the historical predecessors, their own history, and the possibilities and limitations of the medium.

In addition to developments in art history, social and political elements have played a role in the genesis of the VJ, from the formation of a youth culture in the 1960s and 1970s to the dark 1980s with the fall of the Berlin Wall as a new light. All these things have contributed to the will to collectively let a voice be heard, to communicate with each other, and to work on new ideas. Political interests, and to a growing extent economic interests, are still having a great influence on the development of VJing. The standardization of clubs has led to monotony in VJ performances. In reaction to this, there has been a noticeable exodus from the clubs back to the art world or to organizing one's own festivals where experimentation reigns supreme. At this time, three main movements can be recognized within the VJ world: the club VJ, the artistic VJ, and the festival VJ.^{xviii} Within the club VJ category one can then recognize an enormous variety of formal languages: from abstract, 3D, found footage, and narrative, to graphic. The latter category in particular has taken off explosively in the last couple of years. This probably stems from the nature of the sphere of activity of the graphics student who is accustomed to working on assignments. The festival VJ, on the other hand, is much more oriented toward the presentation of his work. This VJ is primarily interested in the total concept: the Gesamtkunstwerk. In this, the various elements – image, sound, and environment – cannot be seen apart from each other. Finally, the art VJ is mainly busy with the relationship to the sound. Sound and image here often fuse together into a

whole in which the sound drives the image and vice versa. This form of art fits very neatly into the tradition of the synaesthetic performance, in which one sought after the visualization of the sound or the sound of the (visual) form. Image and sound are inseparably joined together, with the environment preferably distracting as little as possible.

Nevertheless, technology has of course played an enormously important role. It is clear, however, that quality does not automatically improve because of it. The impact of the visuals stands or falls with a good concept and narrative that is attuned to the music and the space. Technology has in fact brought about an enormous proliferation of VJing. At present, it is even possible to VJ not only on a global scale but also virtually via streaming internet. The technology has become more stable and especially cheaper; thanks to this, the art of VJing has intensified. While in the past one had to depend on one's own effort and inventiveness with equipment that was made for other purposes, at present there are countless VJ software packages available, and there is even the first DVD mixer. For the first time in history there is equipment made especially for the VJ. Within the commercial market, the VJ is seen as a phenomenon that is here to stay and a customer with potential for growth. Oddly enough, the VJ continues to figure at the bottom of the list, especially within the club circuit. Conversely, festival and artistic VJs are getting more and more attention. They do however often make use of hardware and software that they have developed themselves, that in some cases is also offered via open source distribution. Another aspect of the expanding possibilities of the technology is that it is increasingly difficult to determine who the intellectual owner of an (art) work is. This has consequences for copyright, but, more importantly still, it influences ideas about creativity, professionalism, and the nature of art.

On the one hand, the VJ world is a clear reflection of existing disciplines such as video, film, and performance art, but at the same time, formal and content-related characteristics of VJing can be seen increasingly often in other disciplines. Programs like Max/MSP and Jitter that have come into being within the VJ scene are now also being used by other artists. However, it is not only the hardware and software that is turning up in other professional areas; the way of working with image and sound is also influencing other work that VJs do. Formal aspects derived from VJing can be found in advertising as well as film and art. Association with VJs and other image-makers is being sought increasingly often from within traditional areas such as theater and dance, in order to experiment with images and new ways of presentation. The distinction between autonomous and applied art, and between the commercial and artistic worlds, will become increasingly vague. VJs are active in a broad field of productivity in which fluid and shifting transitions take place between autonomous art, popular culture, design, advertising, film, and entertainment. This interchange between different disciplines and media leads to new possibilities, new presentations, and a different perception.

Epilogue

As I wrote at the beginning of this article, I did not wish to give a solid definition of VJing. My goal was to set down a number of frames of reference and to show which areas the VJ is active in these days. Obviously, this is only a first attempt to actually define the place of the VJ. With the quotations from the interviews that I have held, I have tried to reflect the varied picture of the VJ scene. Because of this, individual stories have received less attention than they deserve, but hopefully this account will open the door to a deeper understanding. A more extensive report on the interviews can be found at the VJ Culture interactive web site, where excerpts from the interviews can be seen and listened to by clicking on questions and VJs.

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ⁱ Annet Dekker, “Synaesthetic Performance in the Club Scene,” in: Cosign 2003: *Computational Semiotics*, University of Teesside, Middlesborough (UK).

ⁱⁱ For an extensive historical investigation into the predecessors of VJ culture, see: Annet Dekker, “Synaesthetic Performance in the Club Scene”; Gene Youngblood, “Expanded Cinema”; and Matthias Michalka, “X-Screen”.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sheryl Garrett (paperback 1999) p.112.

^{iv} Stefan G. on eyecandy, Wed Mar 14, 2001, 7:49 PM, Message 7206.

^v Pieter van Bogaert, Music for Televisions.

^{vi} Michael Lev, “Live Cinema: Designing an Instrument for Cinema Editing as a Live Performance,” in: *Proceedings of New Interfaces for Musical Expression 2004*. Hamamatsu, Japan, <http://web.media.mit.edu/~lew/research/livecinema/>

^{vii} The first steps toward good practice have been taken in the research projects *Conserving van Moderne Kunst* [Conservation of Modern Art] (1997) and *Project Conserving Videokunst* [Project for Conservation of Video Art] (2000-2003). Results of these projects have appeared in: Gaby Wijers, Ramon Coelho and Evert Rodrigo (eds.), *The Sustainability of Video Art. Preservation of Dutch Video Art Collections*, Amsterdam: Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art, 2003, ISBN 90-807675-1-4.

^{viii} The project “Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art” initiated by the Netherlands Institute for Culture Heritage, began officially June 1, 2004. This research project into the stewardship and preservation of installation art is being carried out as part of the EU program Culture 2000. The rapid obsolescence of media technologies, the interactivity, and the site-specific character of installations present a challenge to current ideas about long term conservation, documentation, and presentation.

^{ix} “Video clip” is not the correct name here, because the sale of music tracks is not the main thing that matters.

^x In the Netherlands, NoTV has recently released two DVDs for which they commissioned a VJ and a DJ to make a visual music clip together; see www.notv.com

^{xi} Zanne, in a reply to the forum Visual Sensations, June 30, 2004, <http://visualsensations.nl/forum/viewtopic.php?t=25> (April 2005)

^{xii} Marije Oostindie reaches the same conclusion in “De VJ: entertainer of kunstenaar? Over de VJ als fenomeen binnen de postmoderne kunst” [The VJ: Entertainer or Artist? On the VJ as a Phenomenon within Postmodern Art], her thesis for a degree in Art and Art Management, University of Groningen, 2005, p.33.

^{xiii} According to Rutger Wolfson (director of the Vleeshal, Middelburg, the Netherlands) the reticence of museums to take interest arises from lack of knowledge and uncertainty concerning their own skill: “Because VJs and the internet fall outside of the traditional area of expertise of museums, most museums opt simply to ignore it. Maybe then the problem will solve itself.” – in: Rutger Wolfson (ed.), *Kunst in Crisis* [Art in Crisis] (Prometheus Amsterdam / de Vleeshal, Middelburg, 2003), p.21.

^{xiv} Marije Oostindie in her dissertation “De VJ: entertainer of kunstenaar? Over de VJ als fenomeen binnen de postmoderne kunst” [The VJ: Entertainer or Artist? On the VJ as a Phenomenon within Postmodern Art], her thesis for a degree in Art and Art Management, University of Groningen, 2005, p.57.

^{xv} This question was raised by Marga van Mechelen and others during the symposium “VJ Culture in the Netherlands” that was organized as part of Visual Sensations and took place on February 12, 2005 in Paradiso, Amsterdam. See also: http://www.mediamatic.net/article-200.8960.html&q_keyword=200.262 (May 2005).

^{xvi} The answer to this question can be read in an earlier essay that I wrote. Annet Dekker, “Synaesthetische performance in de club scene” [Synaesthetic Performance in the Club Scene], in: Bart Vandenabeele and Koen Vermeir (eds.), *Gemedieerde Zintuigelijkheid. Jaarboek voor Esthetica 2003* (DAMON bv, 2003) p.33-43.

^{xvii} See: Annet Dekker, “Synaesthetische performance in de club scene” [Synaesthetic Performance in the Club Scene], in: Bart Vandenabeele en Koen Vermeir (eds.), *Gemedieerde Zintuigelijkheid. Jaarboek voor Esthetica 2003* (DAMON bv, 2003) p.33-43

^{xviii} In the 1990s, an identical division could be seen within the film world. As a counterpart to the increasingly digitized and animated commercial Hollywood movies, Dogma came along with a new approach. Back to the true-to-nature way of filming. Although also inspired by the new technology, in particular the arrival of small handheld cameras, one wanted to make use only of the film medium, without employing additional means such as lighting, makeup, and post-production effects. On the other side, the film world also shifted toward the visual arts. Large three-dimensional installations were presented in which the use of space and various applications of narrative structures had a central role.

With internet art as well, there is also a similar movement under way at present: the “purists” who concern themselves only with the formal aspects of the internet, then those who principally make use of special

software that is especially suited to the internet, for example Flash and QuickTime clips, and finally those artists whose work may be seen both on the internet and in the public space.