

Cornelia Lund  
Holger Lund

# On the Aesthetics of Con- temporary Visual Music

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**Cornelia Lund, Holger Lund.**

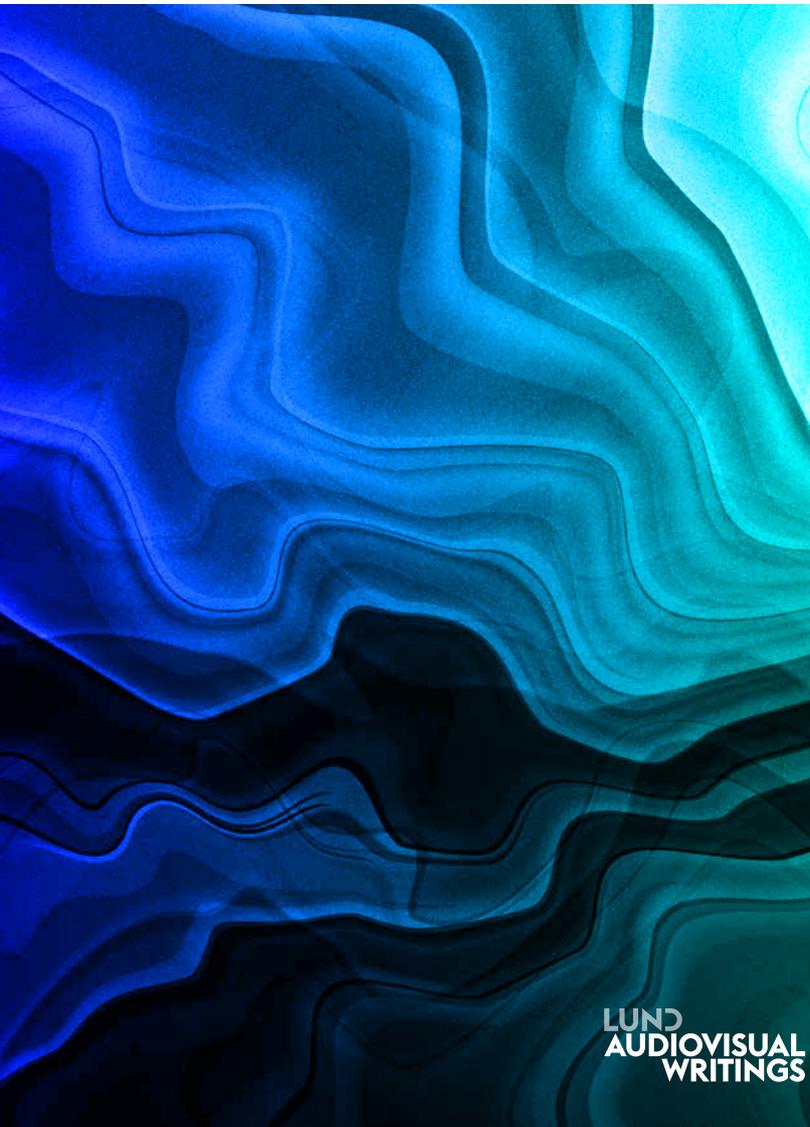
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The aesthetic characteristics of visual music today are as diverse as the contexts in which they appear: visual music can be performed live in clubs, within a New Music framework, or it can be created in a studio as an audiovisual production for DVD. Mostly the aesthetics are informed by the features and possibilities of digital software and hardware, but also by analog devices, for example slide and overhead projectors on the visual side of things.

Even if many forms of visual music explore dance or dance-like characteristics, they do not always feature dancing images. The focus of this essay will be on tendencies in contemporary visual music where images are made to dance in various ways. These tendencies are based on refinements and new developments in software and hardware. In the first part, “The New Elasticity of Images,” we will examine new possibilities in dance-like image movements and structures that relate to music; in the second part, “Film Beat,” we will explore experiments that simultaneously process image and sound, and their resulting audiovisual products.

The New Elasticity of Images

*On the Relation between Film and Dance*

As a starting point for our examination of the “new elasticity” of images postulated here, let us briefly discuss some of the categories characterizing the relationship between film and dance.

First we have to distinguish between *on-screen* and *off-screen* dance. *On-screen* dance includes the dancing of persons but also of objects or lights taking place within the projected film image, dancing that in most cases has occurred as an event in front of the camera lens. As *off-screen* dance we can describe the dance of the camera itself,<sup>1</sup> or of the projector as well as the projector beam.<sup>2</sup> In a scenic situation, where the projected image is controlled by the movements of people dancing, the dance is also *off-screen*. This situation can be set up e.g. with the software *Isadora* in combination with various control interfaces.<sup>3</sup>

Two other cases can be added to these common categories. The first is a dance made out of images, realized through editing and montage. This dance is produced with filmic means, or, more exactly, it is post-produced. The recorded footage here serves as a material for the dance. Man Ray and Maya Deren have worked in this area of

<sup>1</sup> See for this director Jean Rouch in an interview section titled “La Danse du Cameraman”: “A ce moment-là il y a une chorégraphie improvisée du Cameraman et de son équipier.” Quoted from “Cinéma: Mémoire du Monde. Entretien entre Jean Rouch et Eric Pauwels,” in: *Nouvelles de Danse* 26 (1996), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> This can be seen in relation to the filmic experiments of Anthony McCall and has indeed become part of the practice of contemporary visual music: “Some of my video isn’t even designed for the screen. It’s for aerial beam effects, extrusion effects, in rooms with a lot of haze, fog, or smoke and where I’m not doing rear projection. The beam is more visible in the air than where it finally lands, so I design it to look good from the side. Like, it might just be some colored dots moving lowly against a black background. Bounce it off of a DMX mirror you’re controlling, and you can make the beam pattern dance around on the floor like a person.” Stefan G, interviewed by Paul Spinrad in: Paul Spinrad. *The VJ Book*. Los Angeles: Feral House, 2005, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://troikatronix.com>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

filmically generated dance, recording film sequences and making them dance in post-production.<sup>4</sup> The second case is the dance *of* images, which refers to the frames themselves. Here again the filmic images serve as material for the dance, but this time it is not the events within the projected image that form a dancing entity, but the complete projected image. Different from off-screen dance or e.g. expanded cinema, the projector does not move, instead movement is generated by computer software or mixing hardware. In this manner, the movement becomes inherent to the sequence of frames and not to the cinematographic dispositif.

Both of these uses are continually evolving thanks to digital new media and their processing power. Especially the second additional category, the dance *of* images, could not be realized without the efficiency of new processors as well as recent developments in software and hardware. These developments have resulted in a dynamization of the filmic image, in a new elasticity of images—a trend that could only emerge in the post-rendering age, in which digital real-time performance has become possible. And it first emerged in the field of visual music.

### *Visual Music*

Since the 1960s we find an increase of productions in art and popular culture that combine different media to synergetic effect. At that time, the foundations for what characterizes intermedia and multimedia today were laid in their essentials, especially in the use of electronic media. The more intensive combinations of music and filmic images in visual music, though, have been a development of the last five or ten years—after early attempts in avant-garde films of the 1920s and '30s and the expanded cinema of the 1960s and '70s. This cultural practice cannot be seen separately from developments in computer technology, delivering ever faster processors and more powerful graphics cards. Since 1999 real-time processing—the visual accompaniment of music live and in real-time—has become available without technical difficulties and for a moderate expense.

When improved computer technology enabled and popularized the coupling of filmic image sequences (so-called visuals) with music in real-time, the number of audiovisual productions rose significantly. New aesthetic forms were created (digital visual music) as well as new career options (the VJ = Visual Jockey), new technologies (mixer hardware, user software), and new forms of organization (audiovisual DVD labels with different channels of distribution).<sup>5</sup>

Visual music is different from other varieties of music visualization. Somewhat simplified, the following distinctions can be made:

<sup>4</sup> See Cornelia Lund. *Französische Lyrikillustrationen*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2002, pp. 172–186, and “Vom Spitzentanz zum Kragentanz: Tanz als filmästhetisches Paradigma,” in: Gisela Febel, Françoise Joly, Silke Pflüger (eds.). *Paradox oder Über die Kunst, anders zu denken: Mélanges für Gerhart Schröder*. Kemnat: Quantum Books, 2001, pp. 360–366.

<sup>5</sup> See Holger Lund. “Visual Music,” in: Cornelia Lund, Holger Lund (eds.). *An den Rändern des Films: Vom Lichtspiel bis zum Filmtanz*, 2006, [http://www.fluctuating-images.de/files/images/pdf/Visual\\_Music\\_engl.pdf](http://www.fluctuating-images.de/files/images/pdf/Visual_Music_engl.pdf), date of access: November 23, 2017.

- Visual music differs from color music both technologically and regarding its subject, since color music merely aims at a translation of music into light and color. Against that, visual music will utilize all the possibilities offered by “digital cinema,” as defined by Lev Manovich,<sup>6</sup> which includes live-action footage and animated images as well as all manner of hybrids in between.
- Visual music differs from experimental film in the role that the music plays, and in the live editing of the image.

From expanded cinema and video art it is differentiated by a more consistently rhythmical coupling of the image to the music, and from music shows on television and music videos by the absence of the performing star musician, on whom all visual events are centered. Put differently: in visual music the music is usually off-screen, we see neither instruments nor their players or people singing. In contrast, music videos mostly feature the music on-screen (even if the playing of instruments and the singing are mostly simulated).

Additionally, contemporary visual music has up until recently mainly been performed live —different from music videos, which are produced in a studio. Also the sequence of the visuals is usually either cyclical or associative, barely narrative—again, different from music video, which often is conceived as a narrative.

Still the boundaries are elastic: visual music as a category is open toward music video, video art, expanded cinema, and animation. If nothing else, this is due to the term “visual” itself, which allows all manners and combinations of moving images, be they created on film, on a video camera, an overhead or slide projector, or by light projections.

Even if the term VJ is derived from the DJ, the Disc Jockey, the VJ has many more functions. A DJ mostly takes care of the music. The VJ, on the other hand, is often a technician (installing the visual tools), a creator of images, producer, and visual designer all in one. In this latter capacity, he not only delivers video sequences, but also the light and colors within a room. Thus visual music can be understood as a form of cinema that is performed live, often featuring several projection screens or monitors geared to the performance space. Live cameras, mixers, software, effects gadgets, projectors, monitors, and the spatial situation combine to a dynamic system that forms the instrumental setting of the VJ. Accordingly, VJing as a performative live action can also be seen as “medial interior design.” It follows the specifics of a performative aesthetic, which is why, in Paul Spinrad's *VJ Book* from 2005, VJing is called “video performance,”<sup>7</sup> and the VJ listed as a “performance cinematic artist.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Dancing Images*

We have described the two categories in which filmic images may serve as material for a dance, as a dance *out of* images and a dance of images. Here are some examples of recent new developments in this area:

<sup>6</sup> See Lev Manovich. “What Is Digital Cinema?” 1995, <http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/what-is-digital-cinema>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> David Pescovitz, quoted in Spinrad 2005, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Warwick interviewed by Paul Spinrad in: *ibid.*, p. 108.

The dance *out of* images has been developed by techniques such as multilayering, looping, and zooming as well as digital strobe lighting. The video *Tits of My Origin* (2004) by Pfadfinderei/Modeselektor offers an example for multilayering, zooming, and looping. Various sequences of graphics and live-action footage, as well as live-action footage deconstructed by graphics, are layered one over another throughout long stretches of the video. The stream of images is further choreographed by quick zoom-ins and zoom-outs, combined with very short loops. An example of digital strobe lighting can be seen in the video *Au Quart de tour* (2004) by Antonin de Bemels. Here the dancer is brought to a halt when the stream of images is stopped at single frames, then a dance is created from these frames with the help of stroboscopy. The resulting dance of the frames jumps back and forth in its rhythm structure, aligning itself to the music's multilayered rhythmic patterns by following each of the changing patterns rhythmically. So it isn't merely a dance of the frames but also a dance-like movement from pattern to pattern.

The dance of the images can only now be realized thanks to new technological developments. An example for the techniques of trembling, looping, and video scratching<sup>9</sup> is offered by Pfadfinderei/Modeselektor's video *Grass Grows Greener* (2004). In this video, very short loops are repeatedly built and then processed by scratching the images, quickly spinning them back and forth in a procedure that Pfadfinderei have described as cue pointing.<sup>10</sup> Here the dancing entities cannot be found within the filmic image, but are formed by the frames themselves. The same applies to the trembling effect, which appears especially in the second half of the video where single frames are made to tremble jerkily but rhythmically. The complete image thus trembles to the beat of the music.

As an example for a completely new treatment of images we can look at the visual synthesizer CG-8 (see Figure 1). This device was developed by Edirol, a branch of the company Roland, and became available in 2005. Since this tool is still new, we cannot yet cite a large number of quality examples of its application, although it is used for instance by Addictive TV from London. So in the following we will discuss the possibilities of this visual instrument rather than productions created with its help.

The original product promo reads: "A sampling synthesizer takes audio in or regenerates it from a wave generator and then modulates it with filters and amplifiers before outputting the sound. In a similar fashion the Edirol CG-8 can take in still images, create motion pictures from these and then modulate them with Modifiers and Fade Controller. It's easiness to grasp, and user-friendliness allow artists to concentrate on making stunning visual displays without getting caught up in complicated operations."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The term video scratching was coined in analogy to the DJ scratching vinyl records. It has become a standard feature in high-end DVD players for use in VJing. The term video scratching is related to such phenomena as video juggling (again, formed in analogy to the beat juggling of the DJ) or cue pointing. It seems that so far a consistent, clearly divided set of terms and definitions does not exist.

<sup>10</sup> In conversation with the authors in August 2006.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.edirol.com/products/info/cg8.html>, date of access: April 7, 2005; accessed through the Wayback Machine on [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) on November 23, 2017.

The CG-8 has a “tactile real-time control surface” and comes “equipped with 16 pads to trigger visuals instantly plus infra-red D-Beam and XY pad to manipulate visuals further”<sup>12</sup> (see Figure 2). The image signal can be placed on three axes labeled X, Y, and Z. It allows the controller to place, rotate, and invert two-dimensional images in simulated space—in principle this had already been possible with the VJ software Modul 8,<sup>13</sup> though that did not offer a three-dimensional interface like the D-Beam, which allows control of the image signal through movements of the VJ's hand over the sensor field (compare the “range of detection” in Figure 2). The D-Beam works similar to a Theremin and truly allows three-dimensional controlling and shaping of still images or image sequences. With this tool the user can work with dance from two different angles: first, in reference to the dance of images within the room; second, with the VJ as a performer who executes hand and body movements above the sensor field like a dancer.<sup>14</sup>

In summary we should note that the dance of the images can now be performed in real-time thanks to new methods of processing and new user interfaces that increasingly influence the aesthetics of contemporary visual music. The ability to perform in real-time—controlling the image signal with immediate visual output in front of an audience in a performance situation—will be discussed in further detail in the following section.



Figure 1  
CG-8 by Edirol, 2005

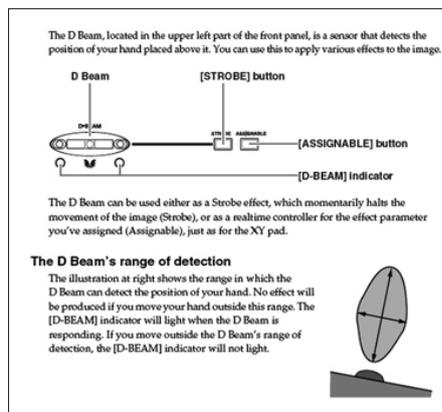


Figure 2  
Excerpt from the CG-8 manual

Figure 3  
Acropolis, discotheque,  
Rome, c. 1980



### *Performative Interfaces*

In the 1970s, early installations of video monitors appeared first in the clubs of New York City and the Radical Design discos in Italy (see Figure 3), then across the rest of the world.

During the raves and club events of the 1990s, the status of these visuals did not change fundamentally—they are still seen as a “low attention type of art.”<sup>15</sup> Even if the task of VJs is to compensate for the visual deficits of DJ culture, the weakness of their own performative presence remains comparable to that of the DJ. Turning knobs and pushing faders is a somewhat unrewarding sight for an audience. Accordingly, VJane Melissa Ulto states: “It's not performance art,

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.garagecube.com/modul8/index.php?c=tech>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> See the demo video on <https://vimeo.com/5352433>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Olivier Sorrentino interviewed by Paul Spinrad in: Spinrad 2005, p. 30.

where I'm focusing on the audience. I'm on my own space with my gear, which requires a lot of attention. One friend described me and the VJs I perform with as 'monitor junkies.'" <sup>16</sup>

Remarks by Jay Smith are similar to Ulto's viewpoint: "With VJing, hardware has been a real problem. With a DJ you've got mixers, you've got turntables, and everything's designed for its function. But with VJing people are using bastardized controllers, like triggering clips with a musical keyboard. You see someone performing like that onstage with a band, and you'd think they're playing keyboards rather than visuals—which blows. People just miss the point. Other times, VJs just sit behind their computers, and as far as the audience can tell, they could be typing an email or playing a DVD, They don't see any connection between the performer and the visuals." <sup>17</sup> And George Stadnik adds: "Club visuals have another problem, which is that they lack a sense of individual authorship. And that's a basic requirement for any mature form—you have to know who's doing what, and who's borrowing what, and who's referring to what." <sup>18</sup>

Kim Cascone sees the law of causality at work, both in regard to the acoustic and the visual areas: "Even within the cultural framework of 20th century music there are people who still cling to the notion that music performance needs to carry a visual counterpart (I call this 'gestural theater') to the actual music being produced ... as if the music is made more rich or meaningful through the gestures of a performer ... people can't let go of needing to verify causality in a musical setting. I find it odd that people don't demand the same proof of causality from a piece of visual art but some of this has to do with the difference between temporal and spatial arts. We demand to see proof of causality when a piece is being performed real-time." <sup>19</sup>

Here the interface of the CG-8 with its D-Beam could mark a first step toward changing the VJs behavior, attaching increased importance to performance, as the act of controlling the image becomes more visible and comprehensible to the audience. Two other interfaces used by Jay Smith offer more performative options: the Viditar and Tactic (see Figures 4 and 5).<sup>20</sup>

With their design based on rock music's classic instrument, the electric guitar, the Viditar and similar video controllers bear witness to a longing for more performative action, in which the control of images becomes physically and causally comprehensible to the audience. This corresponds to the recent trending of retro rock as a reaction to the crisis of electronic laptop music.<sup>21</sup> The crisis is mostly caused by the player's performative distance from the audience, which often merely perceives a person staring at a screen behind the opened

<sup>16</sup> Melissa Ulto interviewed by Paul Spinrad in: *ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> Jay Smith interviewed by Paul Spinrad in: *ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>18</sup> George Stadnik interviewed by Paul Spinrad in: *ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Turner. "The Microsound Scene: An Interview with Kim Cascone," in: *ctheory.net*, 2001, <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14586/5431>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> See Jay Smith interviewed by Paul Spinrad in: Spinrad 2005, pp. 118ff as well as <http://lividinstruments.com/tag/viditar> and <http://lividinstruments.com/products/lagacy>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Sandro Droschl, Christian Höller, Harald A. Wiltsche (eds.). *Techno-Visionen: Neue Sounds, neue Bildräume*. Vienna: Kunstverein Medienturm, 2005, *passim*.

lid of a laptop. Since the audience does not know which parts of the performance are live or what the person at the computer even does, this kind of laptop performance misses visual access or accountability, both in computer music and VJing on a laptop alike.

Accordingly, performative video interfaces have gained in significance at the start of the post-digital age, as proven e.g. by the USB hardware MD-P1-S developed from the Japanese VJ software Motion Dive (see Figure 6).

Here we come full circle: since access to visual material by click of a mouse became too slow and complex for users of the VJ software Motion Dive, an additional hardware controller had to be developed. It was designed to allow a more haptic-analog mode of working, similar to that of a DJ. The website of the manufacturer of this hardware controller promised users a “DJ-Style Visual Performance: Just like taking two musical tracks and fading them back and forth, scratching or adding effects, the idea is the same with motion dive. Use the smooth A/B Fader to alternate between channel A and B, scratch the clips rhythmically with the Scratch controls, and use the front-panel knobs to control color-EQ effects and BPM. Select video clips quickly by dragging and dropping them into the A and B output channels, or by using the large dial and Channel buttons on the controller.”<sup>22</sup>



Figure 4  
**Viditar, video interface**  
by Livid, c. 2005



Figure 5  
**Tactic, video interface**  
by Livid, c. 2005



Figure 6  
**USB hardware controller**  
**MD-P1-S by Edirol, c. 2006**

This truly marks the beginning of the post-digital age, as interfaces are led back into analog-haptic territory for better control during use. In certain regards, the new elasticity of images is followed by a new elasticity of the creator of images—and with the help of analog-haptic or three-dimensionally active controllers, creators can unfold their performative energy possibly also in a dance-like fashion, fully visible to the audience.

#### Film Beat

“[...] performers need the ability to control the audio. They don't currently have this, because most of the live audio mixing tools are designed for the DJ/VJ scenario, which divorces the VJ from the sound. None of the major software applications I know of give you significant control over the audio production. Sometimes they take audio in, but only for triggering or eye candy ‘visualizations’ that are dictated by the music. From the other end, almost all software for mixing

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.roland.com/us/products/md-p1-s>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Warwick interviewed by Paul Spinrad, in Spinrad 2005, p. 110.

audio clips can't handle video very well, if at all—certainly not in the sense that a VJ or live cinema artist requires.”<sup>23</sup> With these words, Henry Warwick, organizer of the San Francisco Performance Cinema Symposium (2003), addresses a fundamental factor of live video performances to music: the connection between image and sound. In the DJ/VJ scenario of the club that Warwick mentions, this is often problematic, since visuals are seen like a moving photo wallpaper that has to adjust itself to the music instead of distracting from it by an especially striking aesthetic that might interfere with the dancing. Often DJs and VJs in a club are positioned so they have no eye contact, and the DJ will see the visuals badly or not at all, which complicates or even prevents collaboration. It is partly from the experience of such situations that video performers increasingly feel the need to gain control over both parameters, image and sound. More and more they turn toward the development of suitable software and hardware to fulfill this need. Already in 2003, the VJ and musician ke4 (Philipp Rahlenbeck) programmed an audiovisual control software.<sup>24</sup> In 2004 Pioneer launched the DVJ-X1 mixer that, among other things, allowed scratching DVDs analogous to scratching vinyl records. Also in 2004, at the Mutek Festival in Montreal, minimal techno DJ Richie Hawtin used a multimedial controlling unit developed especially for him: the CTRL live controller, which runs the video software Touch by Derivative and the audio software Ableton. The CTRL controller allows access to more than 120 parameters regulating audio, video, lights, and effects in real-time. However, the large range of possible functions threatened to overwhelm the performer, and Hawtin was led to the assessment that he would need some practice on his new instrument before it could be used in a meaningful way.<sup>25</sup>

Yet despite the fact that the demands facing a user of audiovisual software and hardware appear comparably high—ideally, users should have an equally developed competence regarding both image and sound—we can observe a growing trend toward such tools, both in live performances and studio productions. Often these projects approach the meaningful combination of image and sound, which audiovisual productions generally aim for, through the choice of source material and the means of processing: as a source material, artists take short film clips, produced by themselves or others, that combine an image with accompanying sound. These film clips are treated as basic audiovisual entities, and simultaneously processing image and sound with the same parameters (looping, scratching, changing the running speed, etc.) will generate a new audiovisual product.

This simultaneous processing of image and sound in film or video is not a new invention. The techniques used here, such as playing the film in reverse, manipulating the running speed, or looping scenes, were already developed in early film, even before the advent of sound. Today of course these effects can be applied to the film and the soundtrack at the same time. Video, too, itself a genuinely audiovisual medium, was the object of experiments in which audiovisual sources were processed, for example in the work of Steina and Woody Vasulka.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See [www.ke4.de](http://www.ke4.de), date of access: November 23, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> See Heiko Hoffmann. “Plastikman live,” in: *Groove* 89 (Aug/Sep 2004), p. 93.

<sup>26</sup> See for this Yvonne Spielmann. Video: *The Reflexive Medium*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008, pp. 197ff.

About ten years before VJing had its popular breakthrough, Martin Arnold anticipated key elements in the aesthetic of today's so-called audiovisual mash-ups—audiovisual remixes of found footage—in his reworkings of Hollywood movies of the 1940s to the '60s. In *Pièce touchée* (1989), he shows a woman reading in an armchair and a man entering through a door behind her, and then slowly starts moving them into a sort of welcoming dance. The movement of the woman's head and different stages of the man entering the room are looped in turn, creating a choreography of glances between the two actors. Through additional loops and especially through very quickly repeated loops of short film snippets and their mirroring, this turns into the impression of a dance-like gyration, while the sound likewise becomes more rhythmical. In *Alone: Life Wastes Andy Hardy* (1998), Arnold reedits a song scene from a movie in such a way that rhythmization, loops, and speed changes spawn a new song that goes along with the new moving images.

Arnold characterizes his working process in an interview, citing *Pièce touchée* as an example: “I was interested in using single frames, and I think the film-maker who influenced me most in this approach was Peter Kubelka who was very active in giving lectures in Vienna and always insisted that film was composed of single frames, and that we should think of film in terms of single frames. So that's how I got interested in single frames. Together with a friend, I built my own optical printer which is a tool that you can use to re-photograph single images, single stills, from an already existing film. When I started doing these things I tried all kinds of structures like running it forwards, then running it backwards, then I even inserted breaks and worked with extreme time lapse and also slow motion. So I did all kinds of things and ended up with this continuous forwards and backwards movement because I found them the most interesting.”<sup>27</sup>

Arnold shows an interest in the musical strategies of sampling,<sup>28</sup> and his approach sometimes yields an aesthetic similar to the mash-up. His basic premise, though, is essentially filmic in its emphasis of the single frame.

Similarly, the video *Timber* (1997) by Coldcut and Hexstatic—in which the artists evolved their signature audiovisual aesthetic, simultaneously producing electronic, beat-oriented music and corresponding videos of short clips with sound—was still put together frame by frame, although created digitally in the film editing software Adobe Premiere. For a quicker style of work within this aesthetic, Coldcut also developed the software VJamm (1997), which, uniquely in its day, allowed the digital processing of sound and image in real time. To make this possible, the artists replaced frames by short clips as basic entities. Even in the first version of VJamm, clips could be triggered in real-time, their speed manipulated, and they could be played forward and backward. Since the audiovisual aesthetic of Coldcut and Hexstatic is rooted in the context of club culture, in VJing or DJing respectively, it is heavily beat-oriented and dominated by extremely quick shifts from one clip to the next.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Mika Taanila. “Interview with Martin Arnold,” in: *Avanto Festival*, 2001, [http://www.avantofestival.com/avanto2001/2001\\_screenings/fv\\_arnold\\_interview.html](http://www.avantofestival.com/avanto2001/2001_screenings/fv_arnold_interview.html), date of access: November 23, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.vjamm.com/>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

The historical background outlined above allows various approaches to audiovisual production. We find both studio and live productions that use either film material generated for the purpose, or, more often, found footage. For his piece *Scary Dancer* (2001/2003), for example, Ronald Kolb aka Adios Motherfucker chose excerpts from a movie starring Al Pacino and made them into a deadly dance-like action scene for the actor. Image and sound are both completely taken over from found footage and processed and edited in an equal manner. While this does not result in a piece of steady beat-oriented music, the rapid changes between short sequences that are sped up and played both forward and backward create a dancelike structure, where Al Pacino dances toward his death to the rhythm of a gunshot that becomes music.

In contrast, Gabriel Shalom worked with his own film and sound material to create *House* (2005). It is the filmic symbiosis of a documentary crash course on house music and of its own audiovisual production: inside a house at morning, a young man wakes up and prepares breakfast for himself. In a kind of wordplay on the name of the genre, the homely noises of the toaster, the microwave, and the man's eating form the basis of a house track that directly illustrates the explanations of DJ Scott Hardkiss regarding diverse styles within house music. The resulting music has been produced by rhythmically editing both image *and* sound—what Shalom himself calls “videomusic.” Here the documentary level and visual music overlap, so that e.g. part of the track illustrating Micro House is edited from snippets from Hardkiss' earlier explanations.

Both the works by Kolb and Shalom mentioned here relate to the aesthetics of VJing and music video, but they can hardly be grouped within a commercially-oriented context. All the same, this kind of audiovisual “remix” has also been prevalent in the commercial field for some time e.g. in the television program *MTV Mash*, launched by MTV in summer 2003, “in which video clips were treated in the same way that usually musical tracks are combined and remixed: two (preferably very different) music videos are grafted onto and blended into another, both musically and visually, to compose a new and often very original clip for broadcast.”<sup>30</sup>

The British duo Addictive TV, formed by a VJ and a musician, has used the format of the audiovisual remix or mash-up in various contexts, and examples from their work offer a fitting conclusion here. In one of their videos they set up *Blondie vs. The Doors* (2005), remixing two music videos in the manner of the program *MTV Mash* mentioned above. And for a live remix during Roskilde Festival in July 2005, they fittingly chose footage from another live performance, the first TV appearance of the Rolling Stones. The play with two live situations became especially poignant during the end of the performance, which showed the Rolling Stones taking bows to studio applause on

<sup>30</sup> “[Die Sendung MTV Mash,]in der Clips ebenso behandelt wurden wie sonst miteinander kombinierte und geremixte Musikstücke: Zwei (möglichst unterschiedliche) Videos wurden—musikalisch wie visuell—so miteinander kombiniert und ineinander geblendet, dass daraus ein neuer, oftmals origineller Clip entstand, der sodann gesendet wurde.” Henry Keazor, Thorsten Wübbena. *Video Thrills the Radio Star. Musikvideos: Geschichte, Themen, Analysen*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2005, p. 12. The Internet, with portals such as YouTube and many available do-it-yourself instructions, also contributed to the popularization of mash-ups. See Verena Daurer. “Online-MashUP. Video i2.0,” in: *Groove* 103 (June 2006), p. 51.

loop, which blended with the live applause of festival guests cheering the members of Addictive TV in front of the screen. During their performance, the song “Satisfaction” was submitted to a treatment that put the Stones into flowing dancing movements far beyond the usual stage choreography through loops and repeats. At the same time the original song was changed: underpinned with a drum 'n' bass rhythm, the compositional structure was shifted around, as the bridge was weighted just as heavily as the chorus, so that the performance by Addictive TV created a completely new performance by the Rolling Stones.

In another production, Addictive TV started adapting their audiovisual remixes to the film trailer format. Here a circle closes, since the film trailer can be seen as one of the ancestors of music video, anticipating various characteristics of a music video aesthetic in the use of rapid, non-narrative sequences of scenes to music, as can be seen e.g. in trailers for the TV series *The Streets of San Francisco* (USA 1972–1977).<sup>31</sup> Addictive TV's remix trailer to *Take the Lead* (USA 2006; dir. Liz Friedlander) starring Antonio Banderas includes central elements of the plot—as per usual in a movie trailer—but rearranges them into a new, audiovisual “song.” The film's main topic, dance, suffuses the complete trailer, even in the scenes that do not feature dancing directly. At the beginning, the musical rhythm section for this song is generated through the combination of sounds and images from the film that show Banderas snapping his fingers and clapping his hands, among other things.<sup>32</sup> After 40 seconds, this rhythm section is augmented by additional frames, shown in split-screen format, which present different dance scenes. The frames switch positions, so that beside the dancing shown *in* the film, the positioning of the frames is also choreographed. This process is further developed during the track by adding a sort of spoken word: film excerpts that feature actors delivering snippets of speech are placed on the screen according to the succession of their contribution. After 1:59 minutes the beat is complemented by a visual “beat,” images of a youth beating a car with a golf club. The processed vocals build toward a veritable rap, generated from sounds and images featuring another youth. His words and simultaneous movements are looped forward and backward, so that he is made to sing a very rhythmical but incomprehensible phrase while seemingly moving to the rhythm.

These examples for recent developments of audiovisual remixes are all informed by certain aesthetic parameters, no matter if we classify them as live cinema, studio-produced visual music, or experimental film. Musically they are oriented toward electronic club music, from which they take the beats and techniques such as remixing and sampling. Those originally genuinely musical processes are now taken over and applied to the image. The short clip as a basic entity is adopted from VJing, but now as an audiovisual clip, and the source material undergoes rapid changes and cuts as well as rhythmization. The technique of the loop in these remixes is also a typical feature of VJing, now no longer aligned to a beat, but generating its own beats from the looped audio. The ever repeating, rhythmized movements

<sup>31</sup> This was suggested by a lecture by Henry Keazor on the antecedents of music video, held at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart, November 8, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> In their remixes, Addictive TV do not exclusively work with the original sounds of the movie to generate their music but supplement them to a greater or lesser extent.

of the images evoke the impression of a dance or choreography, arranged and sequenced in suggestive ways. Where human figures are involved, rhythmic repetition of movements to music will inevitably create the impression of a dance, since it follows the basic patterns of dances and choreographies that are usually composed from repeating movements and gestures. When loops or mirror effects create dance-like gyrations, the impression of a dance is even deepened. This dance of the images, which is created by processing image material that in itself is not genuinely dance-like, can historically be traced back to filmic experiments generating dance in post-production, such as *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) by Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy. As we have seen in the audiovisual productions discussed above, the processing of image material is now complemented by the processing of sound. Thus our heading for this section, “Film Beat,” works in a double sense: on the one hand the filmic material is “beaten” figuratively, through editing, scratching, and looping, on the other hand the film as an audiovisual unity creates its own beat structure.



Translation: Lutz Eitel

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