

LEA

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC

VOL 19 NO 3 VOLUME EDITORS LANFRANCO ACETI, STEVE GIBSON &
STEFAN MÜLLER ARISONA EDITOR ÖZDEN ŞAHİN

Live visuals have become a pervasive component of our contemporary lives; either as visible interfaces that re-connect citizens and buildings overlaying new contextual meaning or as invisible ubiquitous narratives that are discovered through interactive actions and mediating screens. The contemporary re-design of the environment we live in is in terms of visuals and visualizations, software interfaces and new modes of engagement and consumption. This LEA volume presents a series of seminal papers in the field, offering the reader a new perspective on the future role of Live Visuals.



LIVE VISUALS

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Leonardo Electronic Almanac

Volume 19 Issue 3

July 15, 2013

ISSN 1071-4391

ISBN 978-1-906897-22-2

The ISBN is provided by Goldsmiths, University of London.

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Leonardo, the International Society for the Arts,
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Leonardo Electronic Almanac is published by:

Leonardo/ISAST
211 Sutter Street, suite 501
San Francisco, CA 94108
USA

Leonardo Electronic Almanac (LEA) is a project of Leonardo/ The International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology. For more information about Leonardo/ISAST's publications and programs, see <http://www.leonardo.info> or contact isast@leonardo.info.

Leonardo Electronic Almanac is produced by
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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC, VOLUME 19 ISSUE 3

Live Visuals

VOLUME EDITORS

LANFRANCO ACETI, STEVE GIBSON & STEFAN MÜLLER ARISONA

EDITOR

ÖZDEN ŞAHİN

The Leonardo Electronic Almanac acknowledges the kind support for this issue of

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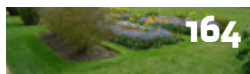
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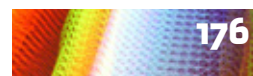


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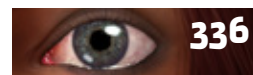
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When Moving Images Become Alive!

“Look! It's moving. It's alive. It's alive... It's alive, it's moving, it's alive, it's alive, it's alive, it's alive, IT'S ALIVE!”

Frankenstein (1931)

Those who still see – and there are many in this camp – visuals as simple ‘decorations’ are living in a late 19th century understanding of media, with no realization that an immense cultural shift has happened in the late 20th century when big data, sensors, algorithms and visuals merged in order to create 21st century constantly mediated social-visual culture.

Although the visuals are not actually alive, one cannot fail to grasp the fascination or evolution that visuals and visual data have embarked upon. It is no longer possible to see the relationship of the visual as limited to the space of the traditional screens in the film theater or at home in the living room with the TV. The mobility of contemporary visuals and contemporary screens has pushed boundaries – so much so that ‘embeddedness’ of visuals onto and into things is a daily practice. The viewers have acquired expectations that it is possible, or that it should be possible, to recall the image of an object and to be able to have that same object appear at home at will. The process of downloading should not be limited to ‘immaterial’ digital data, but should be transferred to 3D physical objects. ¹

Images are projected onto buildings – not as the traditional trompe l'oeil placed to disguise and trick the eye – but as an architectural element of the building itself; so much so that there are arguments, including mine, that we should substitute walls with projected information data, which should also have and be perceived as having material properties (see in this

volume “Architectural Projections” by Lukas Treyer, Stefan Müller Arisona & Gerhard Schmitt).

Images appear over the architecture of the buildings as another structural layer, one made of information data that relays more to the viewer either directly or through screens able to read augmented reality information. But live visuals relay more than images, they are also linked to sound and the analysis of this linkage provides us with the opportunity “to think about the different ways in which linkages between vision and audition can be established, and how audio-visual objects can be composed from the specific attributes of auditory and visual perception” (see “Back to the Cross-modal Object” by Atau Tanaka).

iPads and iPhones – followed by a generation of smarter and smarter devices – have brought a radical change in the way reality is experienced, captured, uploaded and shared. These processes allow reality to be experienced with multiple added layers, allowing viewers to re-capture, re-upload and re-share, creating yet further layers over the previous layers that were already placed upon the ‘original.’ This layering process, this thickening of meanings, adding of interpretations, references and even errors, may be considered as the physical process that leads to the manifestation of the ‘aura’ as a metaphysical concept. The materiality of the virtual, layered upon the ‘real,’ becomes an indication of the compositing of the aura, in Walter Benjamin's terms, as a metaphysical experience of the object/image but nevertheless an

experience that digital and live visuals are rendering increasingly visible.

“Everything I said on the subject [the nature of aura] was directed polemically against the theosophists, whose inexperience and ignorance I find highly repugnant. . . . First, genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine.” ²

The importance of digital media is undeniably evident. Within this media context of multiple screens and surfaces the digitized image, in a culture profoundly visual, has extended its dominion through ‘disruptive forms’ of sharing and ‘illegal’ consumption. The reproducibility of the image (or the live visuals) – pushed to its very limit – has an anarchistic and revolutionary element when considered from the neocapitalistic perspective imbued in corporative and hierarchical forms of the construction of values. On the contrary, the reproducibility of the image when analyzed from a Marxist point of view possesses a community and social component for egalitarian participation within the richness of contemporary and historical cultural forms.

The digital live visuals – with their continuous potential of integration within the blurring boundaries of public and private environments – will continue to be the conflicting territory of divergent interests and cultural assumptions that will shape the future of societal engagements. Reproducibility will increasingly become the territory of control generating conflicts between *original* and *copy*, and between the layering of *copy* and *copies*, in the attempt to contain ideal participatory models of democracy. The elitist interpretation of the aura will continue to be juxtaposed with models of Marxist participation and appropriation. ³

Live visuals projected on public buildings and private areas do not escape this conflict, but present interpretations and forms of engagements that are reflections

of social ideals. The conflict is, therefore, not solely in the elitist or participatory forms of consumption but also in the ideologies that surround the cultural behaviors of visual consumption.

Object in themselves, not just buildings, can and may soon carry live visuals. There is the expectation that one no longer has to read a label – but the object can and should project the label and its textured images to the viewer. People increasingly expect the object to engage with their needs by providing the necessary information that would convince them to look into it, play with it, engage with it, talk to it, like it and ultimately buy it.


Ultimately there will be no need to engage in this process but the environment will have objects that, by reading previous experiences of likes and dislikes, present a personalized visual texture of reality.

Live visuals will provide an environment within which purchasing does not mean to solely acquire an object but rather to ‘buy’ into an idea, a history, an ideology or a socio-political lifestyle. It is a process of increased visualization of large data (Big Data) that defines and re-defines one's experience of the real based on previously expressed likes and dislikes.

In this context of multiple object and environmental experiences it is also possible to forge multiple individualized experiences of the real; as much as there are multiple personalized experiences of the internet and social media through multiple avatar identities (see “Avatar Actors” by Elif Ayter). The ‘real’ will become a visual timeline of what the algorithm has decided should be offered based on individualized settings of likes and dislikes. This approach raises an infinite set of possibilities but of problems as well.

The life of our representation and of our visuals is our 'real' life – disjointed and increasingly distant from what we continue to perceive as the 'real real,' delusively hanging on to outdated but comfortable modes of perception.

The cinematic visions of live visuals from the 19th century have become true and have re-designed society unexpectedly, altering dramatically the social structures and speeding up the pace of our physical existence that constantly tries to catch up and play up to the visual virtual realities that we spend time constructing.

If we still hold to this dualistic and dichotomist approach of real versus virtual (although the virtual has been real for some time and has become one of the multiple facets of the 'real' experience), then the real is increasingly slowing down while the virtual representation of visuals is accelerating the creation of a world of instantaneous connectivity, desires and aspirations. A visuality of hyper-mediated images that, as pollution, pervades and conditions our vision without giving the option of switching off increasingly 'alive' live visuals. 

The lack of 'real' in Jean Baudrillard's understanding is speeding up the disappearance of the 'real' self in favor of multiple personal existential narratives that are embedded in a series of multiple possible worlds. It is not just the map that is disappearing in the precession of simulacra – but the body as well – as the body is conceived in terms of visual representation: as a map. These multiple worlds of representations contribute to create reality as the 'fantasy' we really wish to experience, reshaping in turn the 'real' identity that continuously attempts to live up to its 'virtual and fantastic' expectations. Stephen Gibson presents the reader with a description of one of these worlds with live audio-visual simulations that create a synesthetic

experience (see "Simulating Synesthesia in Spatially-Based Real-time Audio-Visual Performance" by Stephen Gibson).

If this fantasy of the images of society is considered an illusion – or the reality of the simulacrum, which is a textual oxymoron at prima facie – it will be determined through the experience of the *live visuals becoming alive*.

Nevertheless, stating that people have illusory perceptions of themselves in relation to a 'real' self and to the 'real' perception of them that others have only reinforces the idea that Live Visuals will allow people to manifest their multiple perceptions, as simulated and/or real will no longer matter. These multiple perceptions will create multiple ever-changing personae that will be further layered through the engagements with the multiple visual environments and the people/avatars that populate those environments, both real and virtual.

In the end, these fantasies of identities and of worlds, manifested through illusory identities and worlds within virtual contexts, are part of the reality with which people engage. Although fantastic and illusory, these worlds are a reflection of a partial reality of the identity of the creators and users. It is impossible for these worlds and identities to exist outside of the 'real.' This concept of real is made of negotiated and negotiable frameworks of engagement that are in a constant process of evolution and change.

The end of post-modernity and relativism may lead to the virtuality of truism: the representation of ourselves in as many multiple versions – already we have multiple and concurrent digital lives – within the world/s – ideological or corporate – that we will decide or be forced to 'buy into.'

It is this control of the environment around us and us within that environment that will increasingly define the role that live visuals will play in negotiating real and virtual experiences. The conflict will arise from the blurred lines of the definition of self and other; whether the 'other' will be another individual or a corporation.

The potential problems of this state of the live visuals within a real/virtual conflict will be discovered as time moves on. In the end this is a giant behavioral experiment, where media and their influences are not analyzed for their social impact *ex ante facto*; this is something that happens *ex post facto*.

Nevertheless, in this *ex post facto* society there are some scholars that try to understand and eviscerate the problems related to the process of visuals becoming alive. This issue collects the analyses of some of these scholars and embeds them in a larger societal debate, hinting at future developments and problems that society and images will have to face as the live visuals become more and more alive.

The contemporary concerns and practices of live visuals are crystallized in this volume, providing an insight into current developments and practices in the field of live visuals.

This issue features a new logo on its cover, that of New York University, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

My thanks to Prof. Robert Rowe, Professor of Music and Music Education; Associate Dean of Research and Doctoral Studies at NYU, for his work in establishing this collaboration with LEA.

My gratitude to Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, without them this volume would not have been

possible. I also have to thank the authors for their patience in complying with the guidelines and editorial demands that made this issue one that I am particularly proud of, both for its visuals and for its content.

My special thanks go to Deniz Cem Önduygu who has shown commitment to the LEA project beyond what could be expected.

Özden Şahin has, as always, continued to provide valuable editorial support to ensure that LEA could achieve another landmark.

Lanfranco Aceti

Editor in Chief, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*
Director, *Kasa Gallery*



1. 3D printing the new phenomenon will soon collide with a new extreme perception of consumer culture where the object seen can be bought and automatically printed at home or in the office. Matt Ratto and Robert Ree, "Materializing Information: 3D Printing and Social Change," *First Monday* 17, no. 7 (July 2, 2012), <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3968/3273> (accessed October 20, 2013).
2. Walter Benjamin, "Protocols of Drug Experiments," in On Hashish, ed. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 58.
3. "The point here is not to issue a verdict in the debate between Adorno and Benjamin, but rather to understand the debate between them as representing two sides of an ongoing dialectical contradiction." Ryan Moore, "Digital Reproducibility and the Culture Industry: Popular Music and the Adorno-Benjamin Debate," *Fast Capitalism* 9, no. 1 (2012), http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/9_1/mooreg_1.html (accessed October 30, 2013).
4. Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (London: Verso, 1997), 97.

Simulating Synesthesia in Spatially-Based Real-time Audio-Visual Performance

by

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TECHNICAL INTRODUCTION

Using the tracking capabilities of the Gesture and Media System (GAMS) – invented by APR of Edmonton, Canada – artists can ‘map’ an interactive space with sound, light and images, and have user-movement dynamically control these elements via small 3D trackers. With GAMS one is immersed in a system where the displacement of a body in space triggers and manipulates events in a digital environment. The user carries a small infrared tracker through a room bounded by four cameras. Up to sixteen trackers can be used simultaneously. The infrared tracker emits light that the cameras can pick out against most other indoor light sources. The tracker then calculates where the user is standing in relation to centre of the room. As the user moves through the room coordinates are sent to a PC. The PC receives the coordinates, and passes them to custom-designed software called FlashTrack. The software allows for simultaneously control of protocols such as MIDI (for music and video), DMX512 (for lighting), and serial or UDP data output (for programming and network-based interaction). The software can be configured so that audio, video and lighting effects can be ‘located’ at specific co-ordinates in the room. GAMS is ideal for motion-

ABSTRACT

In this paper I will describe and present examples of my live audio-visual work for 3D spatial environments. These projects use motion-tracking technology to enable users to interact with sound, light and video using their body movements in 3D space. Specific video examples of one past project (Virtual DJ) and one current project (Virtual VJ) will be shown to illustrate how flexible user interaction is enabled through a complex and precise mapping of 3D space to media control. In these projects audience members can interact with sound, light and video in real-time by simply moving around in space with a tracker in hand. Changes in sound can be synchronized with changes in light and/or real-time visual effects (i.e. music volume = light brightness = video opacity). These changes can be dynamically mapped in real-time to allow the user to consolidate the roles of DJ, VJ and light designer in one interface. This interaction model attempts to reproduce the effect of synesthesia, in which certain people experience light or color in response to music.

based installation as it easy to configure, it can allow for control of multiple media elements simultaneously and it allows for multiple participants to interact with the same environment. Due to its ability to control media concurrently GAMS is also an ideal technology for ‘synesthetic’ environments in which multiple senses are activated at the same time.

SYNESTHESIA

Synesthesia is a condition that allows a person to experience sensations from one sense in a second different sense. One of the most common synesthetic occurrences is a description of color related to musical tones. “How does it feel to hear music in color, or to see someone’s name in color? These are examples of synesthesia, a neurological phenomenon that occurs when a stimulus in one sense modality immediately evokes a sensation in another sense modality. Literally, ‘synesthesia’ means to perceive (*esthesia*) together

(*syn*).”¹ There exist multiple types of synesthetic experience, as outlined on the Mixed Signals’s website: “... synesthesia comes in a many varieties. When a person thinks of mixed senses, what generally comes to mind is the mixing of sight and sound, taste and touch, or maybe smell and sound. If only the five senses – sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch – were considered to be ‘mixable’ synesthetically, there would theoretically be 20 different forms of synesthesia...”²

As synesthesia is a neurological condition based on subjective experience of sensory input it is difficult to verify the exact claims made for its occurrence. However, there is a strong enough body of qualitative evidence based on recent neurological analysis to conclude that the condition is real for about 5% of the population: “Synesthetes rarely talk about their peculiar sensory gifts – believing either that everyone else senses the world exactly as they do, or that no one else does. Yet synesthesia occurs in one in twenty people, and is even more common among artists.”³ In

addition with the development of more refined brain scans there is compelling scientific evidence that synesthetes can experience the sensation of one sense in response to stimulus from another sense: "In one test, a synesthetic person was blindfolded and placed in a recording tunnel of the brain-scanning apparatus and wore headphones that produced spoken words at regular intervals.... The brain scan taken from the right side of the head of a blindfolded synesthete shows activity in the color center of the brain at the back of the head... when she hears words. This activity is absent in nonsynesthetes."⁴

SYNESTHESIA AND THE ARTS

When discussing synesthesia in art, a distinction needs to be made between two possible meanings:

1. Art by synesthetes, in which they draw on their personal synesthetic perceptions to create works of art.
2. Art that is meant to evoke synesthetic associations in a general (mainly non-synesthetic) audience.⁵

For this paper I will primarily focus on the second option described above, referring specifically to works of art that seek to simulate the effects of synesthesia. There are a several examples of synesthetic simulation in the arts of the past two centuries. Devices such as the color organ (sometimes later referred to as the light organ) have a history dating back until the 18th century, with working models patented as far back as the 1890s: "The British inventor Alexander Wallace Rimington (1854–1918), a professor of arts in London was the first to use the phrase 'Colour Organ,' in his patent application of 1893. Inspired by Newton's idea that music and color are both grounded in vibrations, he divided the color spectrum into intervals analogous

Note	Colour
C	red (intense)
C#	violet or purple
D	yellow
D#	flesh (glint of steel)
E	sky blue (moonshine or frost)
F	deep red
F#	bright blue or violet
G	orange
G#	violet or liliac
A	green
A#	rose or steel
B	blue or pearly blue

Figure 1. Notes to colors on Scriabin's color organ.

to musical octaves and attributed colors to notes."⁶ It should be noted that Rimington's 'Colour Organ' did not produce any sound by instead was meant to be played alongside an organ which played the musical side of the synesthetic performance. Multiple versions of a color organ that could play both light and sound simultaneously were produced in the early 20th century, most notably the 'Farbenlichtspiel' color organ created by Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack and Kurt Schwertfeger at the Weimar Bauhaus in 1923–24.⁷

The idea of simultaneously performed sound and visuals was a notion that influenced a wide variety of artists and musicians in the early modernist period. For example the Russian composer Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915) "was influenced by synesthesia, and associated colors with the various harmonic tones of his atonal scale."⁸ Scriabin was a self-described synesthete who claimed he experienced certain colors in response to the twelve tonalities of Western music.⁹ His idea for the color organ was that certain colors would be activated in response to specific tonalities, as shown in Figure 1.¹⁰ Scriabin famously composed his *Prometheus, Poem of Fire* (1911) using a device

called a 'chromola' invented by Preston S. Millar. "In Scriabin's system, the color changed only if the tonality or key of the music changed. In this way Scriabin prevented the beholders from being overwhelmed by a bombardment of colors, as happened in performances by Rimington, where every played note was accompanied by a color."¹¹ The initial performance of this piece was hampered by the unreliability of the 'chromola.' Later attempts to update the light part of the work have proven tricky as well: "... there have been different performance attempts which reflected the possibilities of lighting technology of the corresponding periods. However, whether spotlights and color filters, neon tubes or, just recently, sophisticated LED technology were used, an optimal transformation of Scriabin's visions seems difficult to realize."¹² Despite the above, Scriabin's core idea of a matched system of music tonality to light color was an intriguing concept, and was arguably farther-reaching and more influential than that of Rimington's more basic light organ.

Later experiments in synesthetic combination of sound and visuals expanded the notion to include sound combined with more complex visual experiences, including moving pictures. Early examples of this include Oskar Fischinger's animations which "explored the double identity of the optical film soundtrack, printing regular visual patterns into the 3mm-wide sound strip at the edge of the frame, enabling them to be automatically rendered as sound."¹³ His project *Sounding Ornaments* (1932) is the first example of this striking use of drawn sound: "If you look at a strip of film from my experiments with synthetic sound, you will see along one edge a thin stripe of jagged ornamental patterns. These ornaments are drawn music – they are sound: when run through a projector, these graphic sounds broadcast tones or a hitherto unheard of purity, and thus, quite obviously, fantastic possibilities open up for the composition of music in the future."¹⁴

The Scottish-Canadian animator Norman McLaren later perfected Fischinger's techniques in a series of works using drawn-soundtracks: "The later work of animator Norman McLaren developed Fischinger's techniques, synchronising hand-drawn optical soundtracks with animation in *Dots* (1940), and finally using the synthesised optical soundtrack as synchronised visual source material in *Synchromy* (1971)."¹⁵ Len Lye also expanded on Fischinger's technique updating it to include "a method of painting and staining directly on celluloid.... Films such as *A Colour Box* (1935), *Rainbow Dance* (1936), *Trade Tattoo* (1937) and *Swinging the Lambeth Walk* (1939) include rapid-fire nervous imagery... intricately synchronized not to classical music but to jazz and Latin rhythms."¹⁶ Lye's works are interesting for our discussion as they synesthetically blend visual abstraction with popular music forms. This combination is also evident in my works, *Virtual DJ* and *Virtual VJ*, discussed below.

Later artists continued the conceptual ideas of Fischinger, McLaren and Lye, translating these from animation into filmed and computer-generated experiences. Most notable among these were Stan Brakhage who continued McLaren and Lye's hand-drawn experiments and combined these with filmed abstract collages. The influence of Brakhage, McLaren and Lye continued in the digital age, where computer video editing technology allowed for extremely precise matching of sound to image. An excellent example of this is found in Michel Gondry's video for the Chemical Brother's *Star Guitar*, in which every sound in the piece is matched precisely with a visual object through complex compositing and video editing.¹⁷ This form of extremely precise sound and moving picture mapping is the logical descendent of the initial experiments in synesthetic mapping made by Rimington and Scriabin a century previously.

It is worth mentioning that Fischinger, McLaren and Lye worked exclusively in a fixed film-based medium as opposed to the live performance medium of Rimington and Scriabin. Several artists did begin to work with real-time performed visuals in synchronization (or at least in tandem) with music performances. These were most notable in the 1960s and included various liquid light shows by The Joshua Light Show in support of acts such as Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention and Janis Joplin and The Kozmic Blues Band. For these shows they used a combination of liquids on overhead projectors improvised in rough synchronization with the live music.¹⁸ These projections had much less precision than Lye's or McLaren's exact matching on film, but they did have the benefit of being live, real-time visual performances which could be adjusted or varied according to the needs of the music.

Other groups such as Single Wing Turquoise Bird also used film projection along with light shows in support of acts such as The Grateful Dead and The Velvet Underground.¹⁹ The latter also famously collaborated with Andy Warhol to create the multimedia performance *The Exploding Plastic Inevitable* (1966–67), which included film projections, light shows and of course live music. The Single Wing Turquoise Bird's live visual setup was much more complex than that used by The Joshua Light Show "employing a vast array from powerful xenon projectors and color wheels to four-by-five slide projectors and strobe lights, all united by the performers into one multi-bodied Brodignagian robot reacting to the gyrating rhythm of the music."²⁰ This setup allowed for more precise matching of sound to image and enabled results in real-time that were closer to the exactitude of sound-image matching that Lye employed in his hand-drawn films.

Naturally there have been many other art forms that have referred to synesthesia as a key driving factor

in the conceptualization and realization of artworks. These include the 'musical paintings' of Kandinsky, Hans Richter and others, the 'visual music' scores of composers such as Cornelius Cardew and John Cage, the visual music films of John Whitney and Larry Cuba, the experiments with digital video synthesizers in the 1970s and 80s and a range of computer-assisted performances and installations by artists such as Laurie Anderson: however, the conceptual and formal examples of synesthetic simulation found in Rimington and Scriabin's systems, as well as the animation and video work of McLaren, Lye and Gondry, and the live light and film shows of the Single Wing Turquoise Bird are most appropriate for our discussion.

VIRTUAL DJ INTRODUCTION

"The original concept of *Virtual DJ* was to create a virtual room in which the audience could interact with sound and light by simply moving around with a motion-tracker in hand. With an acknowledgement to the obvious connections with the earlier [motion-activated audio] work of David Rokeby,²¹ *Virtual DJ* is designed as a comparatively populist project, one in which the audience can interact in a very physical, almost aerobic manner to dance-oriented electronic music."²²

"*Virtual DJ* uses two motion-trackers, one controlling drum and bass, and the second controlling melodies and samples."²³ Each tracker is assigned a light and when users move to a new sound zone, lights change in synch with their movements. The lights also follow the users around the room as they explore new sound and light combinations. This interaction model deliberately simulates the effect of synesthesia, as described above. *Virtual DJ* is organized in a series of five sound and light rooms, which become increasingly complex as the users move from room to room. Successive

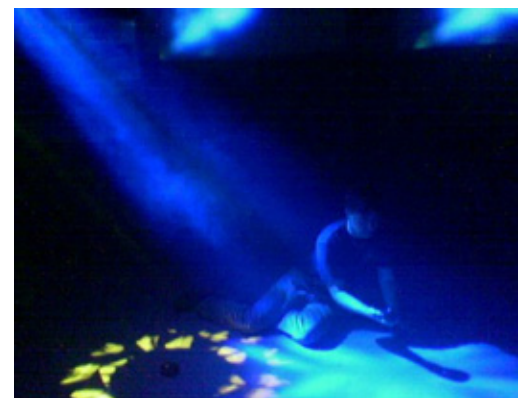


Figure 2. *Virtual DJ*, Steve Gibson, 2005. Stealth Attack Nottingham, Incubation 2005. Photo by Jonathan Griffiths. © Jonathan Griffiths, 2005. Used with permission.

rooms contain some materials related to earlier rooms (such as drum loops), but new audio and light materials and varied interaction models are introduced in each room in order to allow for a more complex and long-lasting experience.

SIMULATING SYNESTHESIA IN VIRTUAL DJ

Virtual DJ uses robotic lights to produce light colors and effects in synch with sound objects and melodic materials. The synesthetic technique used is a mix of Rimington and Scriabin's ideas, but *Virtual DJ* also goes beyond what either of these artists conceived in matching light to sound. Unlike Scriabin (see Figure 1) *Virtual DJ* does not use a strict rule to govern the matching of light color to a specific tonality or note. The only rule that was established was that if a sound object was triggered successively then the same light color and effect would be predictably triggered in response to that object. This strategy makes it clear for users that they can repeat sound materials and they will always get the same light effect in response to their movements.

Despite the absence of a strict rule matching light to sound in *Virtual DJ*, an analogy can be made between Scriabin's technique of matching the color on the

chromola with a change of tonality in *Prometheus*, and the technique of matching the light color/effect with a change of sound object that is used in *Virtual DJ*. Scriabin's idea is quite subtle compared to Rimington's one note / one color technique, which is perhaps best described as overly-obvious and has relatively limited potential for development. A change in tonality is a far more rich concept for a matched color change and speaks to a larger formal possibility for light/sound synesthesia. In addition, as stated above Scriabin's technique avoids the constant change of light color that Rimington's color organ produced (imagine a Bach Fugue of constant 16th notes played on Rimington's device!).

In relatively consistency with Scriabin's approach, in *Virtual DJ* sound objects such as drum loops and bass lines are assigned a light object. A user could choose to stay relatively motionless with a sound object and the light would remain on the same color and/or effect. The user can also move within the spatial coordinates assigned to a sound object (bounding spatial coordinates are called 'layers') and these movements would change audio and light parameters in synch with these movements, while keeping the basic sound and light objects present. Only when moving to a new spatial 'layer' would a new sound and light object be triggered (see the videos in Figures 3, 4 and 5 below for examples of this).

Sound and light in *Virtual DJ* are matched intuitively, and are based on the artist's subjective interpretation of what a specific sound object 'looks like.' Some melodies may appear and each note may be assigned a specific light color in the manner of Rimington (i.e. one note / one colour), but this correspondence is only retained for the single melody itself, and the same notes in new melodies may be matched with entirely different light colors and/or

effects.²⁴ In addition with robotic lights other effects than simple color are also available, extending the possibilities for light-sound synesthetic simulation beyond that of Rimington's color organ or Scriabin's chromola. Moving head robotic lights can act as followspots, automatically pointing to one specific user so she is aware that the light she is triggering is her own. In addition the lights used in *Virtual DJ* have rotation control, dimmer control, and two gobos for

overlaying shapes on the lights. These effects are used formally to emphasize the matching of light to sound.

Figure 3 below shows how the user controls an arpeggiated melody with the first tracker. As the user moves forward the notes of melody go up in pitch. The melody is connected to a red light with a gobo applied. As the user moves forward the rotation of the gobo increases. Figure 4 shows how the user controls

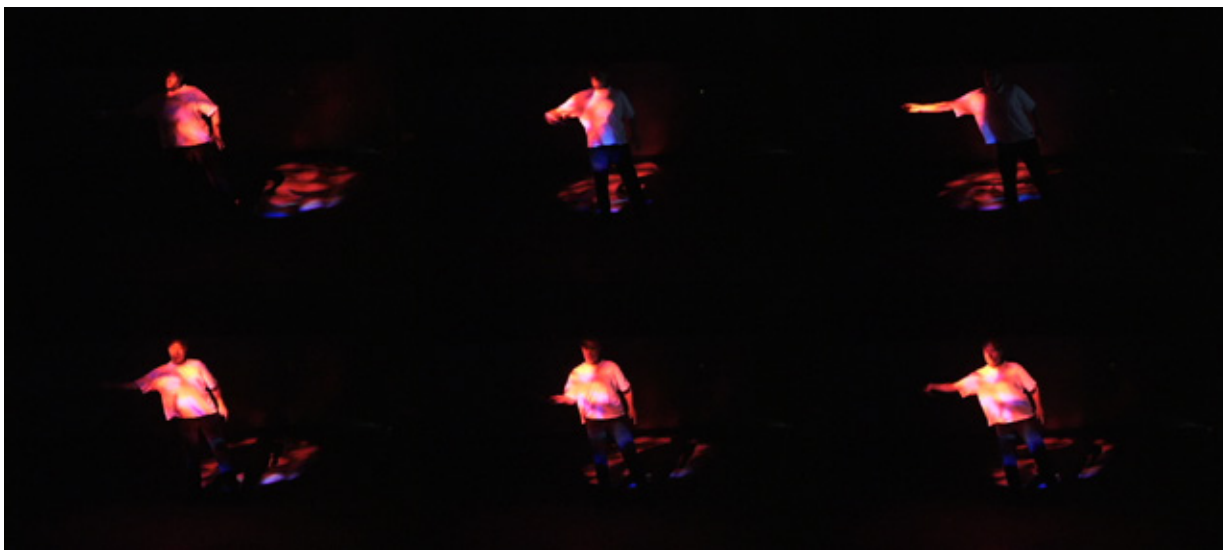


Figure 3. http://www.telebody.ws/LEA/VirtualDJ_room1_melody.mov, *Virtual DJ*, 2005, Steve Gibson, video documentation. Room 1 tracker 1 controlling a rising arpeggio and light gobo rotation with back and forth movement. © Steve Gibson, 2005. Used with permission.



Figure 4. http://www.telebody.ws/LEA/VirtualDJ_room1_drumandbass.mov, *Virtual DJ*, Steve Gibson, 2005, Video documentation. Room 1 tracker 2 performed by Steve Gibson controlling a drum beat and bass lines, as well as the light dimmer and color with back and forth and side to side movements respectively. © Steve Gibson, 2005. Used with permission.

a drum beat and bass line with a second tracker. As the user moves forward the drum beat and bass riff fade up in synch with an increase of the dimmer of a light. As he moves from side to side the bass line changes and this is matched in a change of light color and gobo. At the end the user goes down to the floor and the drum beat becomes more minimal while the light moves from a triple gobo to a single one, thus indicating the thinning of the musical texture.



Figure 5. http://www.telebody.ws/LEA/VirtualDJ_room1_solo.mov, *Virtual DJ*, Steve Gibson, 2005, Video documentation. Room 1 performed by Steve Gibson with two trackers. © Steve Gibson, 2005. Used with permission.

Figure 5 above demonstrates how the elements of the two above videos can be controlled by one user with two trackers. In this example both melody and drum and bass as well as their corresponding lights are combined in real-time.

VIRTUAL DJ MAPPING AND STRUCTURE

In *Virtual DJ* the 3D space has been mapped meticulously to allow users to have a satisfying interactive experience regardless of the style of their interaction. The spatial mapping of movement to sound and light was reworked based on the results from beta tests of hundreds of users over a two-three year period. These tests were both formal (i.e. measured beta tests in a controlled studio environment in which I wrote down user reactions and responses) and informal (i.e.

resulting from a performance after which I arranged a follow up studio session with users). This helped to ensure the use of the synesthetic matching of light to sound was comprehensible in the first experience, but complex enough to warrant an extended experience in the environment.

As mentioned above, *Virtual DJ* is structured in five rooms of increasing complexity. Each room has its own character and varied synesthetic light-sound combination. The video except shown below in Figure 6 illustrates the complexity of the interaction in the final room five. Two performers control the environment, which by this point has multiple levels of interaction, including use of all three planes and measuring of user proximity. In each case though, the light and sound matching has been carefully established for each object. This keeps both the body-



Figure 6. http://www.telebody.ws/LEA/VirtualDJ_room5_duet.mov, *Virtual DJ*, Steve Gibson, 2005. Video documentation. Room 5 performed by Steve Gibson and Jackson zBears. © Steve Gibson, 2005. Used with permission.

based interaction and the synesthetic matching of the mediums obvious enough to be directly understood by the users.

VIRTUAL VJ INTRODUCTION

The general concept of *Virtual VJ* is to allow two users to control different aspects of a sound and video environment with their body movements. As in *Virtual DJ*, two motion-trackers are used, but here one is set to trigger sound and video and the other is set to manipulate the sound and video initiated by the first tracker.

The key conceptual idea that is explored is the idea of cooperation and the sense of personal space in ephemeral, virtual systems. This is achieved by programming the trackers so that dramatic events will happen when the two trackers are close together or at a distance. For example the environment has been programmed so that the trackers apply distortion to the audio when they are proximate to each other and reverb when they are distant from each other. This results in a game of cat and mouse in which the users determine whether they will chose to closely follow

the movements of the other participant or pursue a more individual experience.

The process for developing *Virtual VJ* began with the creation of audio materials, which were then programmed for interaction in 3D space and tested with user movements. Like *Virtual DJ* the audio was deliberately populist, consisting primarily of dance-based

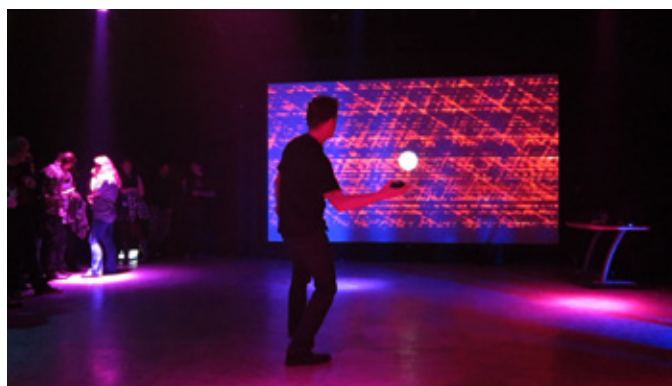


Figure 7. *Virtual VJ*, Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2011–12. Steve Gibson interacting with *Virtual VJ* at CHI 2011, Vancouver, Canada. Photo by Stefan Müller Arisona. © Stefan Müller Arisona, 2011. Used with permission.

Figure 8. This chart shows the mapping of music effect to MIDI data and then to visual data in the Soundium 25 VJ software. For example CC01/07 refers to MIDI channel 1, control number 7. The MIDI data is then programmed into the 3D tracking system so that users can continuously control sound and video parameters in synchronization and in real-time. © Stefan Müller Arisona, 2013. Used with permission.

Voice	Midi (Ch/CC)	Concept	OSC/DL Mapping
Master	CC 01/7	Main Mixer Master	osc_master.in.value
Master Reverb	CC 02/101	Control Glow	osc_master_reverb.in.value
Master Delay	CC 02/102	Control Blur	osc_master_delay.in.value
Flanger Delay/Feedback	CC 07/91	Control Footage Transform Speed	osc_flanger_delay.in.value
Kick Volume	CC 10/10	Control Kick Circle(s) Brightness (B)	osc_kick_vol.in.value
Snare Volume	CC 10/12	Control Snare Circles(s) B	osc_snare_vol.in.value
Hats Volume	CC 10/91	Control Hats Circles(s) B	osc_hats_vol.in.value
Bass Volume	CC 10/5	Control Base Footage B	osc_bass_vol.in.value
Bass Filter Frequency	CC 10/19	Control Base Footage Min/Max/Sat	osc_bass_freq.in.value
Bass Distortion	CC 02/100	Control Global / Local Distortion	osc_bass_distort.in.value
Loop Volume	CC 10/93	Control KSH Circle Radius	osc_loop_vol.in.value
Loop, Kick, Snare, Hats Repeat	CC 02/103	Control Flasher Active/Repetitions	osc_loop_repeat.in.value
Arpeggio Volume	CC 10/71	Control Line Fetzer B	osc_arp_vol.in.value
Arpeggio Filter Frequency	CC 10/20	Control Blur Zoom	osc_arp_freq.in.value
FX Volume	CC 10/84	Control Footage Speed	osc_fx_vol.in.value
VGX Volume	CC 10/72	Control Overlay Footage	osc_vox_vol.in.value
VGX Filter Frequency	CC 10/22	Control Overlay Footage Min/Max	osc_vox_freq.in.value
Guitar Volume	CC 10/7	Control Dave B	osc_guitar_vol.in.value
Vocoder Volume	CC 11/93	Control Dave B	osc_vocoder_vol.in.value
Vocoder Filter Frequency	CC 11/91	Control Dave Smooth	osc_vocoder_freq.in.value
Chords Volume	CC 10/30	Control Dave B	osc_chords_vol.in.value
Chords Filter Frequency	CC 10/31	Control Dave Transform	osc_chords_freq.in.value
Reason Cello Volume	CC 14/7	Not used	osc_cello_vol.in.value
Reason Cello Filter Frequency	CC 13/74	Control Base / Overlay Footage Shader	osc_cello_freq.in.value
Sample Volume	CC 16/7		osc_sample_vol.in.value
Sample 1 On	N 57 A3	Footage 0	osc_sample.in.channel.00.value
Sample 2 On	N 59 B3	Footage 1	osc_sample.in.channel.01.value
Sample 3 On	N 64 E4	Footage 0	osc_sample.in.channel.00.value
Sample 4 On	N 65 F4	Footage 2	osc_sample.in.channel.02.value
Sample 5 On	N 67 G4	Footage 2	osc_sample.in.channel.02.value
Sample 6 On	N 69 A4	Footage 3	osc_sample.in.channel.03.value
Sample 7 On	N 71 B4	Footage 0	osc_sample.in.channel.00.value
Sample 8 On	N 74 D5	Footage 1	osc_sample.in.channel.01.value
Sample 9 On	N 81 A5	Footage 2	osc_sample.in.channel.02.value
Sample 10 On	N 86 D6	Footage 3	osc_sample.in.channel.03.value
Room 1	N 36 C2	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room0/2/1
Room 2	N 38 D2	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room1/2/1
Room 3	N 40 E2	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room2/2/1
Room 4	N 41 F2	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room3/2/1
Room 5	N 43 G2	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room4/2/1
Room 6	N 45 A2	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room5/2/1
Room 7	N 47 B2	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room6/2/1
Room 8	N 48 C3	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room7/2/1
Room 9	N 50 D3	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room8/2/1
Room 0	N 52 E3	Switch to room	/valueset/vvj/room9/2/1

electronica. The piece was initially developed with one motion tracker and then a second tracker was added as a manipulator of the data triggered by the first tracker. A series of nine rooms was established as the structure for the project and one tracker was assigned specific hotspots to allow for advancement to successive rooms. Following the development of user movement to audio control, a related series of controls was built for video manipulation so that seamless connections between the two mediums could be observed (i.e. music volume to image opacity). These controls were then mapped to 3D movements for simultaneous video control by user interaction. The video used in *Virtual VJ* is primarily abstract geometric shapes, with the occasional appearance of video samples that match audio samples from sci-fi films. In *Virtual VJ*

there is a relatively (though not exclusively) fixed set of movements to audio and video controls and these are kept more constant than was used in *Virtual DJ*. See Figure 8 above for a precise list of MIDI mappings between the audio and video objects.

SIMULATING SYNESTHESIA IN VIRTUAL VJ

While *Virtual DJ* is clearly descended from Rimington and Scriabin's color organs, *Virtual VJ* is more closely related to the experiments of Norman McLaren and Len Lye and the live projections used by Single Wing Turquoise Bird. While the matching of sound to moving image is not as exact as in McLaren's and Lye's work, the use of MIDI to trigger video files in precise

synch with sound files recalls their work by establishing firm connections between the two mediums. The relatively reliability of MIDI allows these exact correspondences to be repeated faithfully with an reasonable expectation that once a mapping between a sound and video file is established this will remain fixed. As in *Virtual DJ* each sound object is assigned a visual object, but in *Virtual VJ* these visual objects are not lights but video files. In addition digital-signal processing (DSP) is employed in the live video software Soundium. DSP is conventionally used to cause a visual environment to react to audio in some way. We use this to cause the video files to bounce in synch with the incoming audio signal.

The addition of real-time control over sound and visual parameters extends *Virtual VJ* beyond the possibilities available in Lye's and McLaren's fixed film-based work

and recalls the live visual work of Single Wing Turquoise Bird and others in the 1960s and 70s. However, with the use of precise computer-based MIDI mapping the process is more precise than could be achieved in the Single Wing Turquoise Bird's analog performances. *Virtual VJ* does retain some of the improvisational possibilities of the 1960s live visual events nonetheless: as the sound and video materials are triggered and manipulated in real-time by body motion, participants can choose to re-assemble the audio-visual materials as they see fit. While there are a limited set of sound and video objects and real-time controls, these are sufficient enough to ensure each new 'performance' will be different from the previous one.

The video in Figure 10 on the right shows one performer controlling both the audio and video in real-time. In this example the bass line is connected with

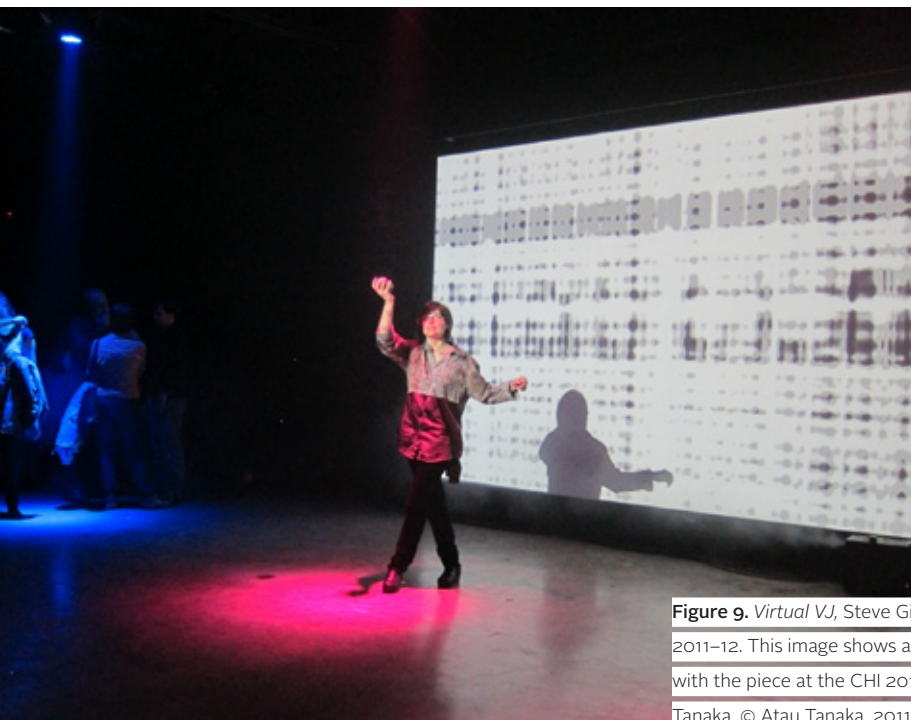


Figure 9. *Virtual VJ*, Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2011–12. This image shows an audience member interacting with the piece at the CHI 2011, Vancouver. Photo by Atau Tanaka. © Atau Tanaka, 2011. Used with permission.

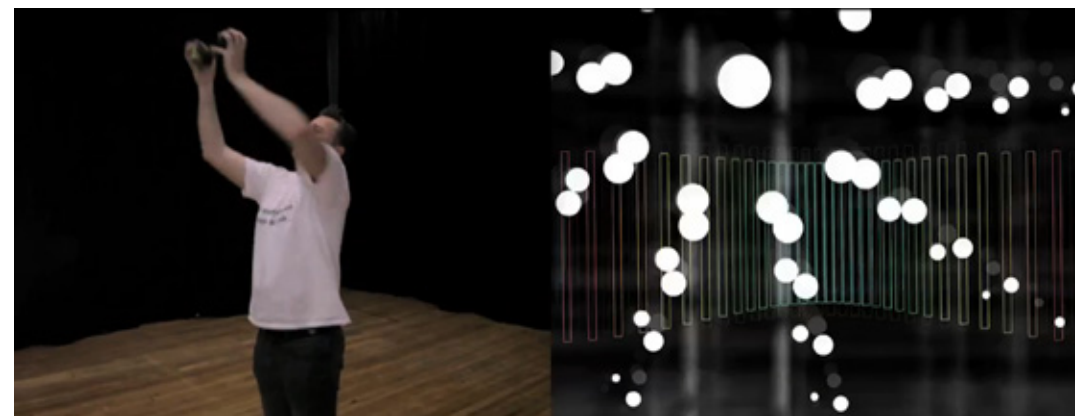


Figure 10. http://www.telebody.ws/LEA/Virtual_VJ_Solo_Room1.mov, *Virtual VJ*, Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2011–12, video documentation. Performed by Steve Gibson. Video shot by David Green and edited by Steve Gibson. © Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2012. Used with permission.

an abstract video of vertical and horizontal lines at the start. When the drums are triggered a geometric pattern of circles is invoked and when the performer lifts his hand past his shoulders a multi-coloured series of vertical lines is triggered in synch with a guitar riff. As the performer brings the two trackers into proximity with each other, distortion is applied to bass track along with video zoom. Finally when the user approaches the screen a new room is triggered, instantiating new audio and video files.

The following video in Figure 11 shows the same materials as in Figure 10 but in this example there are two performers: a dancer using the tracker that triggers audio and video, and the artist manipulating audio and video parameters. Note that in this video when

the performers are distant from each other reverb is applied creating a more 'distant' audio mix. Glow is simultaneously applied to the video track with this performer distance, therefore reinforcing the synesthetic connection between audio and video materials.

The following two videos illustrate the interaction methods in *Virtual VJ* in more detail. In the solo example in Figure 12 the performer triggers the visuals and audio with tracker one in his right hand and he manipulates aspects of both with tracker two in his left hand. As in the above examples, distortion is applied to the bass when the trackers are proximate. When the performer drops to the floor with tracker one, speech samples from sci-fi films are triggered along with corresponding clips from the same films.

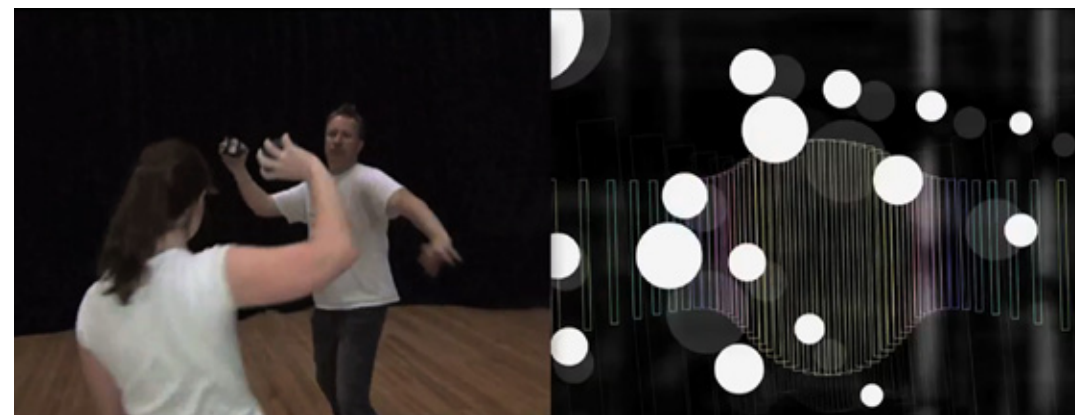


Figure 11. http://www.telebody.ws/LEA/Virtual_VJ_Duet_Room1.mov, *Virtual VJ*, Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2011–12, video documentation. Performed by Olivia Hayes and Steve Gibson. Video shot by David Green and edited by Steve Gibson. © Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2012. Used with permission.



Figure 12. http://www.telebody.ws/LEA/Virtual_VJ_Solo_Room4_6.mov, *Virtual VJ*, Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2011–12. Video documentation. Performed by Steve Gibson. Video shot by David Green and edited by Steve Gibson. © Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2012. Used with permission.

When he lifts tracker one up high (past 150 cm) new melodies are triggered. By using velocity (i.e. speed of movement) in tracker two, the performer can apply delay to the speech samples or to the melody, along with blur to the videos. By moving to alternating ends of the room he can load new rooms. In Figure 12 he passes through three distinct rooms, though it should be noted that some of the AV materials are the same, similar or related between each room. In each succeeding room the interaction design employed is the same, with no drums on the floor, distortion applied to the bass with tracker proximity, etc.

In Figure 13, the same AV materials used in Figure 12 are now controlled by two performers. This results in a more 'game-like' performance than the solo per-

formance, with the users cooperating at points and diverging at others.

OPTO-PHONO-KIENSIA, A NEW TYPE OF SYNESTHESIA?

According to the classification system used by the Mixed Signals website there are an enormous number of possible variations of synesthetic experience. The site uses words of Greek origin to describe these different subtleties. For example 'optophono' synesthesia refers to the experience of sight in relation to sound and 'kinesichromia' refers to the experience of color in relation to movement.²⁶ Extrapolating from this we could posit a type of synesthesia called 'optophono-

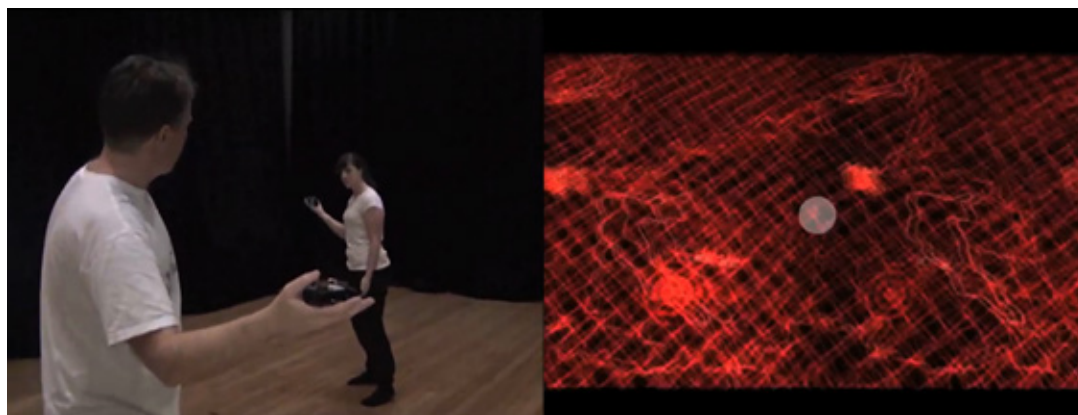


Figure 13. http://www.telebody.ws/LEA/Virtual_VJ_Duet_Room4_7.mov, *Virtual VJ*, Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2011–12. Video documentation. Performed by Olivia Hayes and Steve Gibson. Video shot by David Green and edited by Steve Gibson. © Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2012. Used with permission.

Figure 14. *Virtual VJ*, Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, 2011–12. Jade Valley Winery, Xi'an China, August 2011. The image shows the performance by Steve Gibson, with the video projected on a large wall surface at the winery. Photo by Zheng Wang. © Zheng Wang, 2011. Used with permission.

kinesia' which would refer to the experience of sight and sound in relation to movement. While I have not come upon any synesthetes in my research who possess the exact condition of 'optophonokinesia,' it is theoretically possible. Despite this lack of a confirmed 'real' model, what users experience in both *Virtual DJ* and *Virtual VJ* is in effect a simulation of 'optophonokinesia' in which their movements in 3D space activate simultaneous audio and visual stimuli. Subjective descriptions of both environments have generally defined the experience as one in which 3D space has tactility. When a light is instantiated in synch with a sound as one enters a spatial zone it feels as if that zone has some kind of weight, presence or boundary, confirming at least anecdotally that the simulation of 'optophonokinesia' has been in part successful.

ENABLING SUBJECTIVE USER INTERACTION THROUGH REDUNDANCY

Both *Virtual DJ* and *Virtual VJ* are based on the basic interface design strategy of using redundancy to enhance immediate user interaction. In effect this is how the synesthetic simulation is achieved in these pieces. In addition this is what allows users to have an easier understanding of how their spatial movements are affecting the environment. In short the synesthetic connection between the mediums of movement, sight and sound is what creates the user interface design strategy in *Virtual DJ* and *Virtual VJ*.

In common usage, redundancy is often thought of a negative term, but in computer-controlled environments the use of redundant information in an interface design can often lead to greater user clarity, particularly when the information between mediums is sufficiently obvious. In *Virtual DJ* lights and sound are matched very precisely. When a user perceives a change in sound due to a movement, the lights will change in a similar manner. This redundant informa-



tion over the two mediums allows users to experience a more tactile sense of space and to more easily infer how their interactions are affecting the audio-visual environment. In *Virtual VJ* the redundant information is passed between the audio and video realms in a similar manner to *Virtual DJ*.

Similarly both environments have been mapped in a way that allows them to produce a predictable result (i.e. in *Virtual VJ* raising the hands will generally produce a rise in audio volume and an increase in image opacity). At the same time users are free to roam wherever they wish, to combine audio and visuals in whatever manner they chose. This predictability is in fact an asset in that it allows users to lose their self-consciousness when interacting: they do not fear playing 'wrong notes.' This is in opposition to many similar environments in which users are often mystified by the interaction model due to a lack of spatial planning or an over-complex interaction model. On the other hand the spatial mapping in both *Virtual DJ* and *Virtual VJ* is quite complex; in many rooms several parameters can be changed simultaneously by different motions; however, because the changes are logically mapped to movements and the results are predictable and repeatable, users gain a sense of control that they would not otherwise have in more 'randomly' mapped spatial environments.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued for synesthetic simulation as a way for artists to generally invoke meaning and a correspondence between the audio and visual realms. It has also posited that within 3D motion-based environments the simulation of the cross-modal condition of synesthesia can be an asset when planning for complex user interaction in 3D space. This interface design model could be extended to different types of environments where cross-modality is used, for example in tactile touch-based interfaces which employ simultaneous media control of audio, video, text and other forms.

Using a combination of motion-tracking with matched live video, light and sound the artist can create the illusion of 'optophonokinesetic' synesthesia for participants and viewers. Beyond being a mere technique for creating a hollow spectacle, this tactic can in fact enhance user meaning, helping participants to interact with a 3D environment with more confidence, and producing more satisfying results for both the users and the spectators. Users can intuit spatial interaction interfaces more effectively with redundant information programmed between the different mediums. This assists with creating meaningful interactivity in the unfamiliar medium of 3D spatial environments, and helps establish formal and aesthetic meaning for the audience, while simultaneously avoiding the pitfalls of random and over-complex interface design and programming. ■

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Technology and Production Support for *Virtual DJ* was provided by CANARIE, The Canadian Foundation for Innovation, APR Inc, and The Interactive Institute Stockholm. Production Support for *Virtual VJ* was provided by Culture Lab, Newcastle University.

For further information on *Virtual DJ* and *Virtual VJ*, including documentation, please see <http://www.telebody.ws/VirtualDJ>

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