

Skynoise  
Solu Dot Org : VJ Interview

Pixels in the Finnish house~! Representing the Finnish Pixel, Mia Makela, aka SOLU, has been busy in Barcelona. Aside from helping raise the live audiovisual roof in the last few years with performances, workshops and writings, SOLU has dived into many music, theatre and dance collaborations, has had experimental music videos screened in loads of festivals and added to DVD compilations, helps out with femalepressure.net and recently launched dorkbot.org in Barcelona. An apparent highlight of the recent AVIT-UK world VJ festival, samples of her work and writings can be found at her site : [www.solu.org](http://www.solu.org)

**>>What particularly interests u with live-video at the moment?**

The potential this model of creation has. Watching TV nowadays its easy to notice how little creativity is allowed in mass communication formats of visual creation. I've found inspiration in working with different kinds of music styles – I did visuals for a concert of violin and accordion and it really changes everything in the visual thinking – the rhythm is very different, the visuals should float through time, video poetry.

Creating visuals for dance or theatre pieces or in collaboration with other creative practices, which use space more widely than a screen. I'm quite bored of the one screen-one projector set-up and the 2 dimensionality of it all. Looking forward to when the prices of projectors go down!

I find most fascinating the 'theoretical' interest shown towards VJ art lately – at least 3 books look like being published this year. I guess it all comes from the need to define this scene better, to make sense of it to major public, even though I've liked the creative chaos we've been enjoying all these years, free from the constraints of being definitely ART and being put into a nice package and sold to public. I'm writing my thesis at the moment on audiovisual realtime art, and have found out that there aren't really written history for all this, as the history is like a net of influences, artistic and technical, ideas from synaesthesia to early video art and from stroboscopes to gesamtkunstwerk.

**>>What interests u about live audio-visual performance, as opposed to VJing to music?**

My visual language is searching for similar musical language with a certain structure. Lately I've been thinking of making my own sounds as im more interested in soundscapes than ready-made music or songs. I've done more Live Cinema than VJing, and am more interested in collaborating with various musicians eg Dj Rupture – I made a video for him and now we are planning to continue collaborating – though more like a design job, making visuals for his music, rather than building an AVworld together, which is what I'm looking for.

**>>What's the Barcelona scene like for exploring video?**

There's a lot of interest for video, this is the city of film festivals! It's easy to get big audience for almost any kind of digital art event... sold out noise concerts etc... there was a live visual boom some years ago when everyone got a laptop and walked in front of audience instead of staying at home nibbling with macromedia director... The game modifications visuals scene got particularly strong (glaznost, retroyou,jodi-

click at your own risk ) and also there were quite many Nato processors... and of course now there is the Pure Data generation who go through the same community gatherings as the nato crew did... actually Yves Degoyan, developer of Pidipi lives in Barcelona as many other PDactivists.

I was part of creating the multimedia -AV scene in Barcelona around 2000-2003 as part of (late) fiftyfifty.org, organising workshops of nato, hacker technics etc and audiovisual events and exhibitions and parties.. a really exciting period... now I continue organising workshops on audiovisual realtime creation around Spain and Europe trying to help the next generation getting “air under their pixels”. Telenoika organized the VideA VJ-festival already for many years in Barcelona ... Its said to be the first VJfestival in the world. There are a lot of VJs around but not so many live cinema projects, but ask me in one year time and hopefully the situation has changed.

**>>What’s your general process in preparing for a large video performance?**

For a VJ gig, I’ll go through my video clip library, modifying my max/msp/jitter patch if necessary. Usually I have some ideas I start with, develop videos I’ve shot with DVCAM and I start to process that material (after capturing and editing it into perfect loops). The best stuff comes out from doodling, just trying things out and then boom! something strange starts to happen, that’s the joy of processing video signal. I very rarely use video material as it is, I somehow tend to synthetize it, break it down into its most basic elements and build from there. I have a need for processing as some have a need for patching .. normally I do that on my own and then show my “results” to the public in the format of live composition and some processing parts if it fits the show.

For a performance like ‘Hiding in the Clouds”, the theme was a kamikaze lost in the clouds, so I searched for visual material, scanned, captured, edited, manipulated and processed it in order to show a “narrative” story. With these kind of shows the process includes intense practising and collaboration with the musicians. I also included improvised live speech in the show, and used photoshop live to draw directly to the screen.

With a street dance theatre piece, the process again was very different – I watched for days the dancers practicing, imagining how the visuals would fit them on the stage and also there were a lot of technical things to think about like the distance of the projectors if they should fill the whole stage, also floor. etc etc. As u can see, different approaches depending on the project ...

**>>What’s your connection with the notorious ‘nato’ software?**

Nato was the first software that gave me the push to start exploring the live visual world.. before that I did video art making analogue video, and imposing graphics with amiga. Then multimedia and internet projects seemed to offer more possibilities and not until finding Nato did I return to pure video. Fiftyfifty.org was distributing Nato in the beginning, and invited Netoschka Nezvanova various times to Barcelona, my connection with Nato was quite close but now I’m using the “enemy” software Jitter and sometimes Isadora. Jitter is far more complicated and more made for engineers/programmers than Nato, which was basically a video object library for max/msp, and more fun – it seemed always so fragile, and easy to lose.

**>>As a veteran of so many Audiovisual festivals, what interesting cinema hybrids do you find unfolding?**

The cinema context can actually block the development of new interesting hybrids – there are many live cinema groups doing interesting works, but is the cinema the right context ? I think the best things unfolding have something to do with space. I like Skoltz-Kolgen’s performance with 2 screens where the visuals “follow” the audio from left to right whilst the audio is “moving” in the left and right loudspeakers... even though their performance is not very “live”, it works.

I like the stuff Dumb Type has done in dance context, also Obermaier’s work in Ars Electronica last year was fantastic, with advanced sensor technology and minimal visuals, mapping dancers with different visuals than their background, some other people have been exploring the same idea in opera, a French group, Electronic Shadow, who have done projections for spaces, mapping physical 3d objects with visuals. These projects are all quite complex technologically, mixing media installation and audiovisual work in space with actors/dancers, and using the visual elements sparsely, avoiding totally the normal “video bombing” connected with VJing.

At the MAPPING festival in Geneva this year, the Modul8 crew changed the set up in the club every night, filling the space with transparent screens which created incredible ‘Alice in Wonderland style’ moments ( eg images here – [www.mappingfestival.com/mapping2005](http://www.mappingfestival.com/mapping2005) ). It was great to try to find the style that would make the best effects in the space, black and white minimal stuff worked well.

**>>What would interest you about longer-form videos/films?**

Creating new narratives, touching emotions and creating different kind of cinematic experiences, dreamlike journeys that would enter the receptors like sound does. People are taught to be very critical with image and read images, their socio-cultural-political meanings and even far too easily draw conclusions as fast as possible. Far too much they think of the software, like it would be the answer to all, I don’t know how many times I’ve been asked in the middle of the show “what software do u use?” does that mean they like the visuals? Does that mean they want to do the same kind of visuals ?