

National Cultural Policy Submission

subpixel (George Webeck)

I am submitting this submission as an artist. My main specialisation is in live video production (generally as a “VJ”) in the arts/events/entertainment industries. I live in Sydney and work in local venues, and also often travel interstate to work at music and arts festivals. The ideas I express here are written with the situation in Sydney primarily in mind, with the understanding that some ideas may not translate directly to all places in Australia.

VJing

VJing (live video performance) is a niche arts practice in Australia, however the outcome has high visibility in many contexts. Large screens at music and arts festivals up to the scale of entire buildings, including iconic national assets such as the Sydney Opera House, and so on illuminated by projections for events such as Vivid (Sydney), White Night (Melbourne, Bendigo), and Gertrude Street Projection Festival (Melbourne).

On the other hand, VJing (and related practices – the term “VJ” is generally shunned by the arts sector), is incredibly broad. In my opinion it encompasses all existing visual arts, likely all future visual arts, and elements of event production and many technical fields such as software development. Not all at the same time, but in practically any combination you can conceive of.

VJing requires practitioners, content, venues (indoor and outdoor), and, depending on the context and scale, possibly significant hardware and infrastructure.

I believe that there is not currently a place where up-and-coming artists in this field can train and find community in Sydney. Where do the people who end up projecting on the Opera House come from? We currently invite established international artists and large media companies to fill this space, which I and many of my colleagues view as a travesty. I want to create space for smaller scale, indie, experimental, “fringe” and so on expression in less prominent places – but still in public – for the community of artists to grow and develop their skills.

Practitioners

There are relatively few VJs in Australia, and they are not evenly distributed. I believe there are many in Melbourne, also Queensland (across various towns and Brisbane), and very few in Sydney. I suppose also few in other states and territories. Training, mentorship, etc,

is very hard to come by in this country. People generally arrive here from other fields, such as IT, film/TV, graphic design, etc.

On the basis that VJing is hardly recognised, it is perhaps not surprising that it receives little attention from the broader arts community (to my knowledge). I am interested in teaching people about VJing, including people who are themselves teachers, to expand the pool of practitioners.

Content

On the content side, this is typically a “problem”, since content must be created and can be expensive. An alternative viewpoint is that this practice is a potential outlet for any artistic / cultural production and ideas that (other) artists have to express. It is a canvas, or platform, for the expression of Australian arts and culture.

I came up with a concept of a national (and/or state, and/or more local) media archive with multiple purposes. To preserve local cultural production. To make that cultural production available to be performed, remixed, etc by multimedia artists, VJs, etc, as well as by curators of (public) spaces. A source for research on the state of the arts (and its practitioners). And perhaps also as a library that could be subscribed to for consumers (eg online streaming channels).

I propose the development of new cultural (copyright) licenses that are similar to, if not an extension of, the Creative Commons licensing scheme, where one of the easily-selectable restrictions on use is geographic. eg a license that allows gratis non-commercial use within NSW only. This would give local artists an option to specifically support Australia’s cultural production / output whilst still reserving rights for commercial use (and international or interstate use).

It would also be incredibly useful if the archive had options for purchasing licenses for commercial, etc use, or at the very least to enable potential clients to contact the artists to make such arrangements. It would also be very useful for there to be a set of templates for licensing agreements to make it easier for artists to navigate the complexities of licensing, and perhaps also to establish some expected standards for their clients/consumers.

Venues

Regarding outdoor/public projections (and other kinds of screens), I am interested in establishing a set of permanent or semipermanent venues across the city (Sydney) that are ready to go for projections. The number of hoops to jump through to get permission for projection is prohibitive for individual artists to navigate.

Hardware and Infrastructure

For outdoor/public presentation, setting up the hardware can be difficult. There are issues with dust and weather proofing, danger of electrocution, and just the sheer cost of large-scale projection or other screen technologies that are prohibitive for individual artists.

If spaces are set up as permanent or semi-permanent installations, that massively reduces costs (in the medium to long term), massively reduces the time to get going for individual artists/shows/events, and saves a huge administrative headache.

Other types of infrastructure that would be helpful would be internet access at the sites, media servers and related technologies to remotely program/curate content at times that there is not a live operator.

Five Pillars

First Nations

I am not a First Nations person and do not know how to best address the generations of disadvantage that our First Nations peoples live with. I am broadly supportive of programs that give First Nations peoples access to whatever fields they are interested in, such as providing a guaranteed First Nations place in every training and educational course available to the public, perhaps even if they do have the prerequisites required. That isn't to say each place must be filled, but must be first offered to a First Nations person.

A Place for Every Story

VJing encompasses all arts and can be used to tell any story, as well as presenting non-narrative content. VJing can be very personal, and there are unlimited variations and interests that can be accommodated.

The Centrality of the Artist

The many variations and interests that can be accommodated give the artist unlimited expressive possibilities, and the result is often unique to individual artists in style, technique, and content. There is always something new to learn if you want to.

Strong Institutions

There is currently no official institution that supports VJing in Australia, to my knowledge. I am a member of "VJ Union Australia", which is not an official union from a legal standpoint, and is not supported by any government programs that I am aware of.

Reaching the Audience

My idea for public screens / venues for VJing is about reaching a big audience; not necessarily for every venue, but when there are multiple venues across the city(/country) that are available to use all the time, that is a lot of eyeballs of both local people and importantly visitors / tourists (domestic and international)