

THE VASULKAS

The Theater of Hybrid Automata: History and Funding

The construction of the Theater, as with other investigations of the artist, was designed to provide new experiences. Its construction derives from a long tradition of dramatic and spatial experiments, giving attention to early stage apparatus and its conceptual significance in the evolution of a dramatic genre. On the whole, knowledge of spatial mnemonics and the Memory Theater (such as were devised by Cicero) has influenced this current line of investigation. I am trying to figure out how the rules of dramatic presentation could be further developed and what rules might define a digitally-organized space. This machine was constructed to discover if there is a nucleus of interaction that could redefine the dramatic functions of space, and human presence in it. Learning seems to be the most intensive part of this process for the artists, participants, and for the audience.

The Theater was originally created with the intention of uniting a virtual camera, created in 3D computer graphics software, with its physical counterpart, an actual video camera in physical space. The idea was to probe and record representations of space in both binary and physical form. In 1985, Steina Vasulka collaborated with singer Joan La Barbara on a series of interactive compositions, which were later summarized in La Barbara's theatrical project "Events in the Elsewhere" utilizing in part the design components of what became the Theater. With the addition of a "cube" structure by David Dunn, the system became a complex-audio visual machine. In this configuration the installation was included in the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria in 1990. The system acquired a MIDI violin as a control device and a laser disc was added as part of the real-time interactive display. The system in this development was invited to Ferrara, Italy in 1991 where David Dunn performed PARIAH designed by Woody Vasulka for solo actor based upon the work of actor Tim Thompson. The Theater was awarded the L'Immagine Elettronica Prize. Currently, it is being exhibited at Artifices 2 in Saint Denis, Paris, and a collaborative project is in the works involving composer Morton Subotnik with funding from CalArts for 1993.

We are requesting funding for further research and development of a major collaborative work which will extend the syntactic generosity of machine and human interface by engaging a performer in intimate articulate communication with the machine through his physical movements detected in space. It is hoped that by encouraging a variety of interactive mechanisms, this collaborative work can serve as an expressive vehicle for many artists and performers.

Hopefully, my Theater will provide a critique of psychological theater, or psychological drama as presented in traditional film and theater. I wish to find something that appeals to human perception from rather a different angle — something that is not concretized by an emotional relationship between protagonists, but still represents patterns of behavior and involvement that can be discerned. I believe that our dramatic sense longs for more surprising rules, more abstracted and open-ended genres, expressions, and methods of representing universal principles and tendencies, beyond our own limited psychologies. I am not trying to de-psychologize dramatic space as much as I am interested in making models for alternate states of awareness. —Woody Vasaulka, for NEA, 1992