

Video-in-Performance (V.I.P) workshop

Oogoo Maia

www.oogoo.net/video/vip

vip@oogoo.net

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I have been working in the intersection between performance and the moving image for eleven years. My piece Saltimbancos (1994) for four singers and an actress/reciter used a complex installation of 8 video monitors scattered around the audience. In that first contact with video in performance there was one aspect that became clear to me: the cohabitation of live performance and video in one space raises an enormous amount of questions and it would take me a long time to identify and find answers for them.

the relation between the performer and the image is a fragile one. It's a struggle that the performer will easily lose if he or she is not prepared to understand the force that the projected image has. Adding to this the fact that the performer will rarely have the chance to see how he/she looks next to the image, with the same external eyes the Audience will, which makes a vip training method that more complex.

The delicate issue of perception: how will the audience perceive the projected image in relation to the live element? Can both elements be seen together or is the audience constantly shifting their focus from the images to the performers? And if so can it really be called video in performance, or should we be talking about NOW a bit of video and NOW a bit of performance.

Over the years I have repeatedly returned to these issues, either when working in my own performances or designing video for theatre and dance companies. The result of these explorations has reached a point where there was a good enough amount of q&a to talk about a vip method, which I have been sharing with performance professionals in the past 4 or 5 years, in the form of 2 to 5 days long workshop.

The workshop takes my experience and personal artistic choices as a starting point. In that light, I teach a way of using vip that tries to distance itself as much as possible from the heritage of cinema. This is, I believe, the big danger in using vip, to start off with the model of cinema over which theatre has been placed. I prefer to have the stage as my model and over it I will superimpose the projected image. vip becomes a prop or a character in itself, while at the same time solves a series of problems relating to perception and the construction of the human eye. An integrated use of video on stage is only possible once the cinema screen at the back of the stage is removed.

This first rule is precisely where a new series of problems arise, mostly of a technical difficulty (as opposed to dramaturgical).

My workshop tries to deal with these stage technique problems, though there is ample room for poetry to arise and for simple, dramatic ideas to be tried out.

The workshop uses a video projector, a video camera for live video projection and an in-studio digital video editing suite. The workshop requires a blackout room with very basic stage lighting. These are the tools.

The workshop starts with some very basic ground work, explaining the equipment, how it can be connected, the nature of a video signal, routing live and recorded images through the same video projector, etc

The cone of light that comes out of the projector has different properties depending on the distance, angle, stage light, type and colour of costumes, etc, etc.. We spend sometime discovering the Cone and become familiar with it, as for the performer on stage the cone needs to be like a well mastered prop, sometimes even like a second character with whom he or she will share the stage. It is very important the performer is capable of tracing the limits of the Cone from any point on the stage. The Cone is often a confusing subject and I make use of several video fragments and exercises of progressive difficulty where the performer is slowly made more aware of the difficulties and possibilities behind this technique.

We look into stage lighting issues, ideas behind stage design with VIP in mind and we try out different approaches and ideas.

We then use several video examples to try out the impossible: shape shifting, setting things on fire, making the newspaper front page picture talk, see your own heart beating and other ideas. There is room for experimentation and for suggestions from the participants to be explored and tried out, testing possibilities, trial and error and a lot of spontaneous imagining of impossible things made possible.