oudeis — a world wide odyssey
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Genesis

It all began with a meeting of artists, various people connected with the arts and university professors where possibilities of reducing youth unemployment in Austria were discussed. This was followed by a large family birthday party and dinner at an open air restaurant which brought together people involved in theater, either professionally or as theater-goers, as well as computer freaks.

Tradition

The experimental and anti-mainstream theater of the 20th century demanded a break with tradition as regards stage construction, texts and performance. Even in the 1920s Italian futurist Enrico Prampolini suggested eliminating the proscenium stage because it reduces the dramatic action.

In the 1960s Fringe theater began to forsake conventional playhouses, to find new settings to perform in and involve the audience. Experimenting with new techniques and ways of production became the distinguished element of all groups in the Fringe Theater Movement, as Pip Simmons emphasizes in the program for the Theater of Nations in 1979. In order to promote the development of modern theater art, new media like film, photography, video or television were soon incorporated into Fringe theater production and new creative processes where sought after. Visual aspects predominate in the "performance art" branch of the English Fringe Theater movement. In the "actor- and writer-based companies", collective work and experimenting with dramatic means of expression are employed.

The new venues are many and various: former movie theaters, factories and tram depots, and the street is also used as a performing space. These public locations have recently been enlarged through the exploration of electronic space.

Internet

The theater scene in the Internet evolved from meeting places in the Net set up by theater theoreticians and artists for exchanging information and experience, and for the development of new projects. These are centered around several discussion lists and the communication environment of ATHEMOO. The virtual space of ATHEMOO was designed by Dr Juli Burk, Associate Professor of Theater at the University of Hawa, in June 1995. It provides theater people with the possibility of synchronous meetings.

A play can be performed using the Internet in various ways. It is not absolutely necessary to create a whole new space in the Internet to perform a play. A stage can be situated in some ot the already existing rooms, the online meeting places. Performances took place as early as 1993 in the text-based environments IRC and later in the MOO (Multi User Dimension Object Oriented). Furthermore there are experiments with the more colorful surroundings of the two-dimensional chat place "Palace," and with the use CU-SeeMe videoconferencing software, which includes real-time video and audio.

Collective Collaboration

In the theatrical production of oudeis — a world wide odyssey the collaborative creative work, the traditional working method of the Fringe, was enlarged to the level of a worldwide collaboration. Via the medium Internet people from various continents and cultural environments have been drawn together. Starting from a small local group in Vienna, there are now a number of people involved who communicate via e-mail and in online meetings.

Communication has been established via three mailing lists convering the organization, the dramaturgy and the technical aspects. By means of these Listserv mailing lists, information can be exchanged easily among this group of people. In addition to that a synchronous form of communication is necessary for the creativity as well. Regular meetings of the worldwide team take place in the environment of ATHEMOO.

Odyssey

Over 2600 years ago, Homer told the famous story of the wanderings of Odysseus. Many theories have dealt with the metaphor of the places that Odysseus visited before he returned to Ithaca after ten years. As described by Christine Pellech in Die Odyssey. Eine antike Weltumsegelung (Reimer, Berlin 1983), his wanderings lead him all across the Seven Seas. Using the description given by Homer (directions, ocean currents, prevailing winds, the time taken) she finds a possible route for this voyage around the world.

Several works now reinterpret Odysseus' journey and its stages in a contemporary way. Artists of our century were also inspired by thoughts of changing distances an the significance of locations, an outstanding example being Walter Grond in his Absolut Home [Droschl, 1996].

Odysseus' journey constitutes an excellent metaphor for illustrating the theory of acceleration, the shrinking of the world to a global village. Instead of traveling along the sea-routes, Odysseus will journey along the lines of the Internet.

ou¶eis

The structure of the play is influenced by the form of ancient Greek tragedies. The seven epeisodia, i.e. scenes, are framed by stasima, the songs of the choros. Each epeisodion stages one of the ordeals Odysseus has to undergo on the different stages of his journey. Odysseus travels to the island of the Cyclops where he meets the cruel Polyphemus, the island of Aeolus, lord of the winds, the island of Aeaea, home of beautiful Circe, and even arrives in Hades, staying for some years on Ortygia, the island of Calypso, before he returns to his faithful Penelope in Ithaca.

Each actor will speak in his mother tongue. The interaction between the stages in different parts of the world will take place in multilingual dialogues. The stasima between the scenes are sung in Greek. Odysseus is traveling virtually from stage to stage, from city to city, from venue to venue. In each epeisodion another audience in another country can see a real actor playing Odysseus. This actor is represented by a light cone on the other stages.

People on every stage, on every location, will be able to watch the performance at the same time. They will see real actors interact with virtual ones, hearing the words of Homer.

Choros

being physically present at one of the theaters it will be possible to access the performance via Internet. This gives the opportunity not only to see the action on stage but also take an active part in the performance. Stasima, parts sung by the choros, will be seen and heard between the epeisodia. The choros in the tragedy represented the people. In oudeis the choros will represent the audience which follows the play on their computer screens, a special opportunity for this audience to interact and comment on the play

Sounds of voices singing a capella in Greek, composed by an international ensemble led by Santiago Pereson, will be produced by instructions sent by the virtual audience during the play. A loudspeaker system will broadcast this sound on every stage. The sum of these voices will sound like a chorus, each voice being triggered by someone over the net.

Prototype

The worldwide opening of the global theater performance of oudeis — a worldwide odyssey will take place in 1998. The complex idea and its realization leave a number of questions unanswered. A prototype of the stage and performing concept is intended to answer some of these and pose others. Furthermore the different levels of development of the worldwide partners will be aligned. In a real-life meeting of the participants, some of whom only know each other virtually, at this year's Ars Electronica, further perspectives of the project will be worked out.

The worldWorking arrangements on two scenes, which will be shown as open rehearsals on two stages, will examine and explore the interaction between real and virtual actors. The transmission setups and the inclusion of active participation via the World Wide Web will also be tested.

One hour

Theater is created in the temporal and spatial unity of a role being acted out and the observance of this performance. It is oudeis' aim to reach this oneness by transcending geographical frontiers.

The interaction between the stages and its visualization will take place in real-time, the late night show on one continent will therefore be seen as a matinee on another. Time zones and the duration and rapidity of transmission are included as additional elements in the direction.

Progress

The lightcones will be animated by an idea revolutionary to theater. It will be one of the first times that what an actor really feels while performing is shown. Acting never shows the real emotions of an actor but the emotions of the character he or she is playing. Assuming that the actors playing Odysseus and his companions do not really fear for their lives while together with cruel Polyphemus on stage, the audience are never able to see what the actors are really concentratng on at any one particular moment.

The use of special sensor devices that the actors are carrying will show these normally hidden emotions. The data gathered from these sensors is transformed into light data pertaining to the color and intensity of light. The positions of the actors are scanned via the lighting system of the stages. All this information is transported via the Internet to the other stages and produces the virtual actors there. Of course the performance will look different each evening, because

the virtual actors, as a visualization of the real actors, are real living and feeling human beings, and not previously programmed light variations.

Documentation

To document the ongoing process in the collaborative work of the oudeis team, in addition to the information contained in the hypermail archives of the discussion lists, a monthly newspaper called Status Quo was established in summer 1996. It is available via World Wide Weg where it can also be downloaded as a printable version. Since its first edition it has been growing steadily and now documents not only the development of the oudeis project but also presents other projects currently being staged with the use of the Internet all around the world.

Routing

In 1998 the map of Odysseus' world voyage will be redrawn to a world tour appropriate for the 20th century, following possible routes of a data packet through the Net. From Europe Odysseus goes to Illinois, south to Argentina and Brazil, around the globe to Australia and north again to Asia. The eighth stage is the stage found in the World Wide Web, accessible by every computer all around the world that is hooked up to the Internet.

oufieis — a worldwide odyssey will be seen on seven stages all around the world. On every stage a real actor will not only perform but will interact with his virtual counterparts on the stages that are combined by the lines of the Internet. Besides watching this performance in one of the theaters worldwide it will be possible to access the performance via Internet and take an active part in the performance.

"The theatre is changing. Not before our eyes, but in our perception of its traditional physical space. "
Andrew Garton

"Here we are, all participating in the gestation of this giant beast known as The Oudeis Project."
L.H. Grant

Odysseus wants to go home!
Monika Wunderer

"the world does NOT speak in English ... I think there are more than a hundred live languages in it ... that's what 'worldwide' would mean to me!"
Santiago Pereson

"music is dressed silence"
Santiago Pereson

"how do you show a real actor making love with a virtual actor or even more problematic, a virtual actor making love with another virtual actor?"
L.H. Grant

"i think virtual actors should not be light cones but virtual actors. more than a beam of light should be within them."
Santiago Pereson

"Long live Oudeis!"
L.H. Grant