

1.) Steim Studios / BigEye / LiSA and Note/ Tone Anderson p. 49

BigEye

This software's 'big eye' is actually an ordinary video camera. Linked to a computer, the video input provides a digitised image of space; a rectangle of mimicing pixels. Motion-sensing systems are hardly new, but software such as BigEye, specifically designed for use in performance have the potential to re-work some of the basic corporeal, sonic and utterable presumptions we have about performance and the performing body. BigEye can 'see' changes in the seen space in two specific ways; either as *motion*, or as a *colour*. In the 'motion' mode, the larger and quicker the movement, the greater the area triggered by the motion. If there is no movement in the view of the video camera, then there is no trigger and nothing will happen. On the computer screen, the operator can shift from seeing the video image and seeing the triggered areas. In the 'motion' mode and during movement in the seen space, this is a haunting image of trailed white movement casts. These trails disappear as movement ceases - it operates in the pulse and emphasis of physical movement (although certainly the video camera could view anything moving - I want to focus here on the performing body). Whilst this screenic image of physical change is visually and theoretically appealing on its own, it actually operates as a clumsy trigger in the operation of BigEye. This is because it is almost impossible to control and intelligently use the triggers produced by such movement. In the second mode, the 'colour' trigger is able to be a more precise performative tool. If I have a white top on, and this is the assigned colour of the trigger, then BigEye only sees my white top. In this mode, issues of lighting and contrast play an important role - my white top needs to be the only white object the camera can see - or these other white objects will also function as triggers. Colours of poor contrast to surrounding hues, will produce a plethora of 'leaking' triggers. Lighting obviously affects these issues, such that a well-contrasted trigger one day can change with the shift of natural / artificial light. So, once the performer / operator have a good trigger, she can use it to set off midi files. On screen, the operator can designate any area and assign it a particular midi (sound) file. When this complex of systems is set up the performer can 'play' the space. The most pressing of theoretical and artistic questions is *why* would she want to do that and what in actual effect happens when she does? I am limiting this analysis to the performing female body working with recorded utterances of her own voice. This focus

Page 1 Steim Studios / BigEye / LiSA and Note/ Tone Anderson p. 49 © half/angel

is organised in this way because I want to follow a thread relating femininities, performance, technology and orality. In the studio or the performance space, the skill and dexterity of 'playing' such an invisible, and trapezoid instrument is a curious one. The location of the trigger on her body affects her movements, it charges this site as an operative core. The layout of 'trigger areas' places a similar charge in these locations. For example, the operator can place slim vertical columns at the edges of the seen area, and another horizontally at its top, this would 'charge' these areas with triggerable possibility. The next major issue for using this technology as a compositional and performative tool is the difficulties which result from placing neat four-sided zones on a rectangle of video image on the computer screen, and their translation into the three-dimensional space of the studio / performance area. The most obvious result of this is two-fold: (i) The three-dimensional version of these four-sided areas is *trapezoidal*, since the camera 'sees' from a small 'eye' (lens) and views a much wider sweep. This is perhaps better explained by a series of diagrams. And (ii) there is a danger that the performer responds to this complex of information and triggering possibility by reproducing the two-dimensionality of the screen in her performance. This is a particular danger since this way of operating the system is far more 'reliable' in a literal sense than moving in the z axis (is it?) towards and away from the camera.

Whilst much of the above is technical and descriptive, the possibilities of this software in the performance of femininities is, I think, wonderfully resonant. I am interested in the utterance of text in performance, and what it might mean for such an utterance not to be made damply oral, not mixed with breath and sounding and the bite of vowel, but instead dragged from the space by gesture. Like Duras' worlds of silent performers, working on their choreographies of loss and awash in their attendant sound scapes, no one is seen to speak, but their voices are achingly present. I am interested in this melancholic space of loss between the speaking voice and the body not seen to speak. In the sound of rupture between sound and movement; odd temporalities that cannot be reconciled. In *BigEye*, if it isn't clear that her gesture, her moving body triggers her text, then it plays like a Duras play - choreographies connected to an attendant sound scape. In fact this element is the key to the transgressive possibilities of the work with *BigEye* and recorded text.

Working with BigEye, recorded and live text

In the space marked with my uttered text, the slipperiness of the triggers when initiated by motion, unsettle the play of textual fragments. I must absolutely improvise in the moment, since I cannot 'learn' where exactly the text is. I find it anew. But this is my own voice. What does it mean for a feminine performing body to scrape her utterance from the space? This is a different kind of gestured utterance. One moist with voice, but she doesn't speak. Her body utters nonetheless. If she speaks also, mixing recorded with live utterance, then the body confuses recorded with live speaking, blurs the temporality of the gesture of speaking, of moving in space.

During our residencies in June and September of 1996 we worked on developing some of the textual and thematic frameworks of *mouthplace* into live performance using two programmes developed at Steim; *BigEye* which is a motion-sensing programme, and *LiSA* a live sampling programme. *BigEye* can be used to 'see' colour or motion in the performance space, information which can then be used to trigger other events, such as sound. *LiSA* enables the performer to make sound which is sampled in real-time, (in Gilson-Ellis' case this is the utterance of text / sound fragments) which can then be filtered and played back into the performance space. Sampling and filtering have the capacity to constantly shift. Some of our most interesting work developed out of connecting both these programmes and using a head-set microphone, so that physical choreographies could trigger certain kinds of sounds in the space.

In our work at Steim on translating the *mouthplace* CD-Rom material into live performance, we exchange tenors of interactivity from the intimacy of the computer screen to the charge and dangers of live performance. In the larger scale project *SECRET* we hope to analyse and develop some of these issues further.

Gilson-Ellis: By connecting the programmes *BigEye* and *LiSA* I can crack-open language as I utter it in live performance. The dense sound-scapes that sometimes arise are made through a mesh of connections between the programmer and composer, the technology and my moving / speaking body. I am interested in how this alters a traditional conception of the performing body, and in the odd contemplative haunting it evokes in me to have blurred the difference between utterance and movement in space.