

# Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Blog

## Technology for Mime Training and Devising of 'There is No Silence'

Posted on **14 January 2016** by **ACCAD\_OSU**

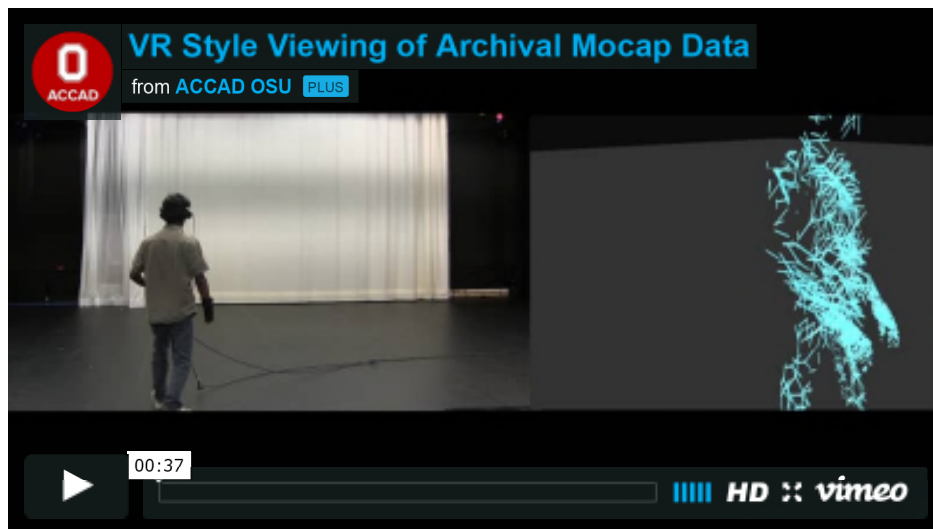
*There Is No Silence* is a two-hour interdisciplinary multimedia performance about the life and work of the French mime artist, Marcel Marceau (1923-2007). It was collaboratively created through a year and half long devising process led by Jeanine Thompson, conceiver and director; Vita Berezina-Blackburn, animation specialist; and Alex Oliszewski, multimedia specialist. It was a partnership between The Ohio State University's Department of Theatre and the Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design, and was performed by the MFA Acting students in April 2014.

The video below is an excerpt of the show featuring the setup that included an onstage motion capture system (Vicon, 12 cameras mounted on truss columns) and rear projection screen above the stage that provided the actor with the visual feedback of their performance. Optical mocap markers were incorporated into the costume of the actress, Sarah Ware.



This video demonstrates one of the goals of this work: to create mime choreography that stands on its own merit, visible in the body of the performer, as well as in their driving of the simultaneously projected virtual avatar. Students were also trained in working with technology as an acting partner including motion capture, animation, video and live silhouette.

The process of prototyping this performance setup as well as the process of training the actors in mime included an investigation of the motion capture data of Marcel Marceau's performances done at OSU in 2001. We developed several ways for students to view the data. One of the most exciting options included a Virtual Reality setup where the recorded data was played back in a virtual space while the viewers were able to walk around and view it in the physical space of the motion capture lab. This required students to wear a tethered Sony HDM head mounted display and limited their physical movement while allowing a life-like experience of the mocap performance in their personal space rather than a flat projection or monitor view. This is demonstrated in video below.



The students learned Marceau's adagio's *At the Bar* from viewing the motion capture data during the session in the studio. Jeanine Thompson also chose specific angles of two movie clip versions of the mocap data, i.e. front and 3/4 views, and gave them to the students to study on their own. The photograph below shows the process of students' working with the projected motion capture recording of Marcel Marceau's adagio. Along with the prerecorded data, those wearing sensors had the options of seeing their avatars in real time. At the time of the photo the visibility of avatars was turned off to allow focusing on Marceau's performance. Thus the adagio was learned from the recorded motion capture material and in the process of live coaching by Jeanine Thompson.

- Acting students are learning Marcel Marceau's adagio "At the Bar" from his motion captured performance visualized with a neutral avatar. Several actors are being motion captured during this exercise.

Afterwards each student motion captured their version of the adagio and their movement was visualized with identical generic grey colored avatars. In the clip below you can see all captured performances combined in one virtual space and played back simultaneously. The students begin from a neutral position, execute Marceau's adagio and finish in the T position, one of the first movements used in Motion Capture recordings to create a template of the actor's body (see also Delbridge 2015: 27).

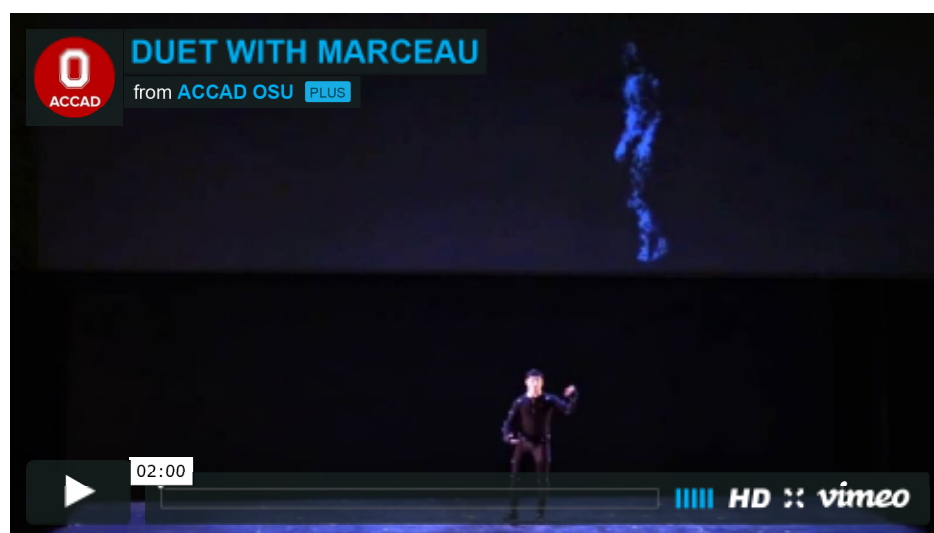


During the session that followed the students met and reviewed all captured performances. Each student's performance was played back side by side with the Marceau's recorded mocap data. Students were given the opportunity to share their observations, compare and contrast their captured performances and note nuances of gesture.

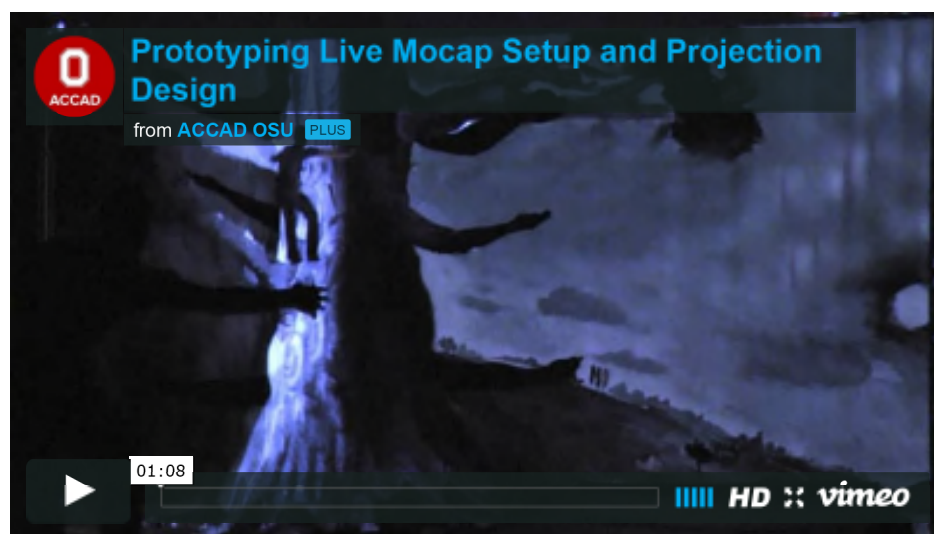
While very few students struggled with memorizing the sequence of actions, the shapes of the gestures were varied. The most intriguing observation made by actors watching each others' captured performances was their ability to recognize who was performing the neutral avatar based solely on the timing and weight qualities of the motion. And while almost nobody was able to get the timing identical to Marceau's original, a couple of performances were identified

as most interesting based on the particular timing variations deliberately introduced by the actors.

Patrick Wiabel used the inspiration of this experience to develop a vignette scene for the show.



The experience of training in the mime technique with the visual mocap feedback echoed that of working with silhouetted shadow performance in that it abstracted the performers' bodies and called for heightened clarity of gesture and timing. The video below shows a combination of the two techniques. We are looking forward to further investigations in these areas.



#### References

Delbridge, M. 2015. *Motion Capture in Performance: An Introduction*. Hampshire, Palgrave MacMillan.

Project Link: [http://accad.osu.edu/researchmain/gallery/project\\_gallery/marcel-marceau-project1.html](http://accad.osu.edu/researchmain/gallery/project_gallery/marcel-marceau-project1.html)

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