

Spirits Melted Into Air

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24th August 2012

*Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:*

The Tempest, Act IV, Scene i

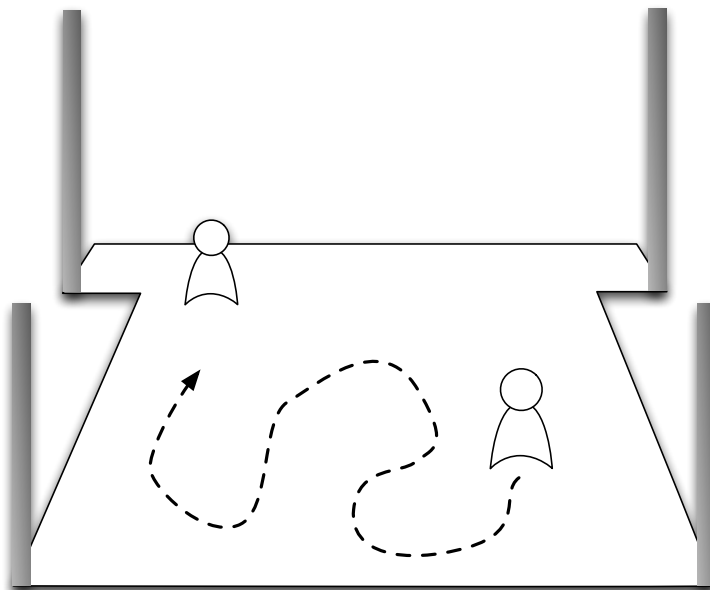
Introduction

Spirits Melted Into Air is a project exploring the motion of actors on stage. Shakespeare is frequently understood - especially by those studying it - as a text first and foremost. But the RSC's work is about interpreting, performing, and presenting that text. Drama is not static: it is physical, it is energetic. The words come to life in the context of a performance. And that performance takes place across a huge stage: though it may look small from a distance, it's a large space for an actor to cover, and many great performances take in all of it.

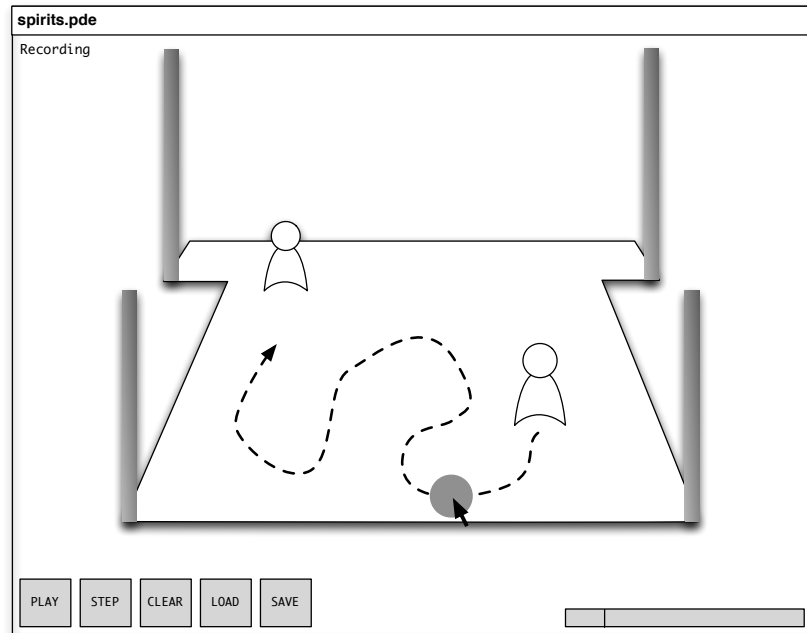
Spirits attempts to show the performance beyond the words: the work of Actors, Directors, and Choreographers. It does that in two phases: first, capturing that performance; then, illustrating and interpreting it.

I: Recording Performance

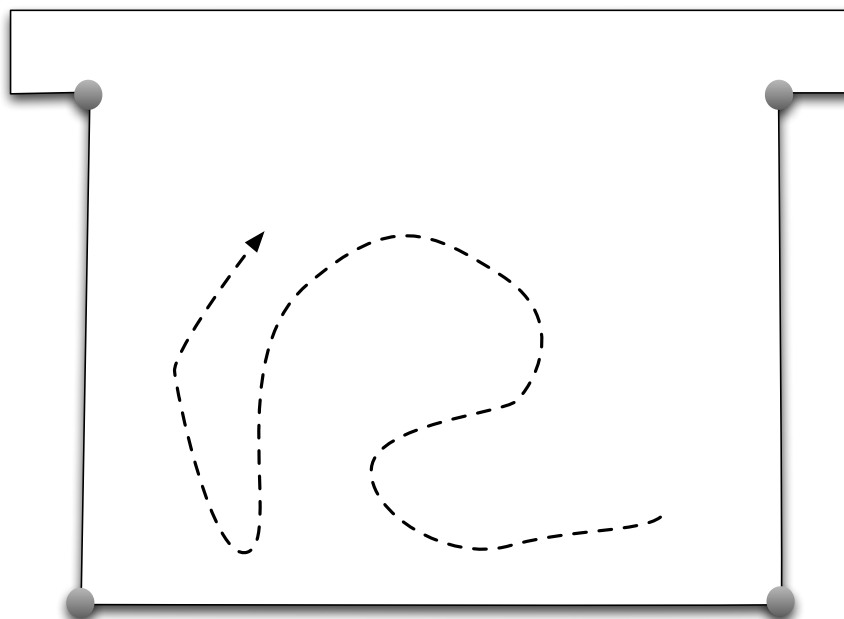
Performances at the RSC are filmed for internal purposes. *Spirits* initially uses the footage from the "master camera", locked off, and taking in the whole stage. The master camera captures the stage in a perspective view, like so:



Once a suitable scene or piece of footage has been found, a recording is created of an actor's movements by tracing them (whilst the video plays) with a mouse cursor. Once all the points over time have been captured, an animation reproducing that set of movements can be played back.



The master camera gives us a perspective view. It would be good, if, instead of having a recording of motion in the "trapezium" of the flat stage, we could "unwrap" it into a rectangle, ideally with the same proportions as the stage. Then we'd have, essentially, an overhead view of the actor's motion, stored as a set of co-ordinates and timestamps.



II: Illustrating Performance

Once we have this raw data, we can translate it into new formats. The output is still very much dependent on the information derived from performance, and what might work well - but could likely include:

- an online animation, depicting the motion of one or more actors through a scene, with quotations overlaid at the appropriate moments.
- static imagery, in the form of beautiful prints that interpret the co-ordinates into flowing shapes.
- the possibility of recreating a scene as directions on the pavement outside the RSC, at life size
- lasercut wood or 3D-fabricated material representing the paths as solid objects - much like jewelry - that visitors could hold.

Appendix: How will the video be used?

The video will be used almost entirely personally by Tom Armitage, whilst he prepares the output. None of the output formats will display any video of RSC actors in performance.

However, it's likely there might be glimpses of the original source footage in any "making of" videos: perhaps a couple of seconds whilst a crossfade shows how the animation matches the actor's motions, or on a monitor being filmed whilst Tom works. This would be deliberately not representative of performance. It's hard, otherwise, to explain how these interpretations emerge from the stage performances.

Whilst the engine behind *Spirits* is entirely open-source, no original videos or images would ever go near any version control repositories: the public would be able to download the source code of the software used to generate the data, but not the RSC video.