

Beam Me Up video from performance 2/11

<http://www.alansondheim.org/beammeup1.mp4>

<http://www.alansondheim.org/beammeup2.mp4>

<http://www.alansondheim.org/beammeup3.mp4>

(Below is a general description which I've prepared for an online class coming up.)

I have an installation in the online virtual world, Second Life. If you go <http://slurl.com/secondlife/Odyssey/48/12/22> - you will find it. In order to use this URL, you need to have a Second Life account; you can get this at <http://www.secondlife.com>. The installation is called The Accidental Artist and is quite complex - I've been changing it for the past eight months. You can find all sorts of images and videos from it at <http://www.alansondheim.org/> - these include a number of performances that have been seen and recorded world-wide. (The last was February 11.)

Let me begin with silent film. Roberta E. Pearson, in *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformations of Performance Style in Griffith Biograph Films*, distinguishes between two fundamental modes of performance: the histrionic and the verisimilar. I associate the former with melodrama and the latter with a presumed 'natural' acting style. Melodrama operates through a semiotics of stereotyped poses and movements (hands clasped in prayer for example); traditionally, theatrical poses might be held for a few seconds - forming a tableau (waiting for audience reaction). You can see this mode in operation in silent films; characters will stop and hold exaggerated gestures, as the diegesis is transformed into a meta-narrative of segmented moments. I claim that this semiotics (which also extends into and through subtitles) plays out in virtual worlds as well, since characters are given stock responses (animations) which may be played one after another, in serial order - at times there may be 'behavior collisions' - situations in which animations compete with each other.

In my virtual world (Second Life) work, I use files that have been produced by altered motion capture equipment. A human performer, wearing sensors, moves in a regulated environment, and the movements of the sensors are recorded - this results in a file that allows an avatar to mimic the movement of the human. In my work, however, there are two differences: the sensors are remapped onto the body in a 'non-natural' manner (head on foot for example), and the software itself is rewritten in order to create what I call 'dynamic filters' - the original human move-

ment is filtered to produce new and inconceivable movement. This is the sources of a great deal of my work, which starts from a 'natural' order and proceeds into a distorted digital/virtual one - which may then be returned (through live dance for example) in another altered form to the 'real' world. I see my avatars having the potential frenzy/energy of silent film and the wild movement of Buster Keaton.

(In the excerpts above, the avatar movement is slowed down in grotesque duets with Sandy Baldwin; I did little recording of the high-speed movement since I was working the environment at the time.)