

Special issue on 'Movement and Dance in Colonial Contexts'  
Journal for the Anthropology of Human Movement, 2007  
<http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/english/staff/Vedel/>

## **Silica Tales And Other Moves in Lhere Mparntwe Site specific dance in Arrernte Country, Central Australia<sup>1</sup>**

By Karen Vedel

*Starting at dusk, the site specific performance Dictionary of Atmospheres invited its audience to travel with the dancers through appr. 1.5 km in the riverbed, which runs through Alice Springs, Australia. Journeying through Lhere Mparntwe, the performers engaged with the site as well as with individuals in the audience, who were moved, taken by the hand, and shifted in place. Following the direction of the water, which once or twice a year fills the riverbed, everyone was made a part of the same trickling motion through the heavy sands. A few simple props were employed by the dancers: a piece of red cloth, red ribbons, yellow and black hazard tape, portable mirrors, and a black net. Parts of the performance involved speaking, not 'lines' in a theatrical sense, but uttered and muttered sentences about guilt and shame. Others involved violent acts among the dancers.*

*As the daylight faded away batterydriven, hand held torches took over until, upon arrival in the area framed by three sail-like screens, the performers were lit by projections helped by a few theatre lamps. The projections, most of which were in black and white, showed macro images from the riverbed such as leaves, grasses and ripples in the sand. At the end of the performance the dancers disappeared into the darkness through a lane of torch fires and swiftly burning bundles of spinifex grass.*

### **Abstract**

*Dictionary of Atmospheres* was commissioned as part of the Alice Desert Festival in September 2005. Created by the British-Australian choreographer Tess de Quincey the performance was set in the heart of, what in touristic terms is called 'outback' Australia.<sup>2</sup> From an Aboriginal Australian perspective, however, the same location is of utmost significance due to its density of registered sacred sites.

The analytical aim of the essay is to examine the ways in which site specificity was played out in relation to the spatial, platial and environmental complexity of the location. How did the Tess de Quincey and De Quincey Co's *Dictionary of*

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of the essay has been published under the title 'Dancing Country' in *Dance Metropolis Province, Yearbook on German Dance Research 2007*

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Tess de Quincey and De Quincey Co for inviting me to be a part of the production. I also wish to thank the Traditional Owners, who granted us permission to perform on their land, as well as the Aboriginal persons in the riverbed whose daily spaces were affected by the performance.

*Atmospheres* engage with the diverse and conflicting layers of the performance site? And what were some of the ethical questions raised by the performance? The essay reflects on the ways in which the multiple meanings of Lhere Mparntwe riverbed as location were addressed and commented on through the artistic approach taken in De Quincey's work. It is based in my experiences from participant observation/ observant participation in the production of the performance, on which I worked as a dramaturge to the choreographer.

Examining the notion of site specificity from a perspective, which stresses the corporeality of the performers, the essay contributes to the ongoing reflections on the transformations of the modernist idea, born in the 1960s, that works of art should be informed by the materiality of its actual location. (See Suderberg 2000 and Kwon 2004) I will argue that by examining the creative processes involved in site specific works of art, it becomes not only possible, but also necessary to deconstruct the concept of site specificity into more nuanced and complicated procedures. In the case of performance works, these procedures relate to the repertory of techniques of the performers, the complexity of the site, and to the relationship between the two.

The theoretical framework, within which I pose questions to the material, draws on the vast body of philosophical and anthropological literature dealing with the concepts of space, place and site. Included are also references to writings on the Aboriginal notion of 'country' as well as to more precisely focused literature on site specificity in performance arts.

### **Maps and place names**

In the very centre of the Australian continent, in the province known as Northern Territory, is the town of Alice Springs. It is named after the wife of Charles Todd, Postmaster General in South Australia in the second half of the 1800s and responsible for setting up the overland telegraph. In the tongue of the Arrernte people, who are the traditional owners of the land on which the town of Alice was built, the area is known as Mparntwe.

The town, which was established around the telegraph station, has remained important as a hub for regional and national as well as international traffic and communications. If you look at a town map, you will notice two parallel lines running through the centre in a north south direction. One line is drawn by the transcontinental

Stuart Highway, the other by a river, most likely depicted as Todd River, which is the name that Lhere Mparntwe was given by the British colonizers.

The map also reveals that roads, connecting the residential area on the east bank with the business centre on the west, intersect the river. The population of Alice Springs is comprised of roughly two sedentary groups: The non-Aboriginal inhabitants, many of who live in a residential area on the east bank of the river. And the Aboriginal inhabitants, most of who live in communities outside the town centre. Furthermore there are two smaller population segments, which may be characterized as transient: One is made up of individuals who have come to Alice Springs in search of a job or are there as a result of one of the many forms of displacement that the Aboriginal communities have been subjected to. A substantial number of these persons sleep either on the banks of the river or in the riverbed itself. The last group of people in Alice Springs is comprised of a constant flux of tourists for whom Alice Springs is a stop on the way to Uluru (Ayer's Rock).

Concealed by the map is the fact that the Todd River is dry 95% of the year. Rather than a flood of waters, the site of the dance performance was a river of sand.

### **Multiple spatial practices**

The fact that the riverbed carries different meanings to different segments of the population may be described by the variety of 'spatial practices', which we find in the area. (see De Certeau 1988: 91 – 131) The notion of spatial practices relates to De Certeaus definition of *space* as an *occurrence*. Space is in this sense seen as an effect of the operations that take place in it. It is *place* transformed by human activity. In the implied distinction between space and place (fr. *lieu*), *place* is characterized in terms of residence and shared identity as an ordering system, "...an instantaneous configuration of positions (that) implies an indication of stability." (De Certeau 1988: 117)

Observations of the daily activities in the riverbed showed two very distinct spatial practices, which mirrored the *de facto* segregation of the population of Alice Springs. The inhabitants of the residential area crossed the riverbed in cars a few times a day attending to work and other affairs in town. Crossing either foot or bicycle were also many schoolkids on their way to and from school. The only 'whitefellas' with a spatial practice that did not merely traverse the riverbed were either members of the local police, who regularly enforced their power of jurisdiction patrolling the

riverbed in a motorized van. Or they were members of the local cricket team, who jogged in the sand as part of their weekly exercise.<sup>3</sup>

The persons, whose daily practices *did* engage with the riverbed of Lhere Mparntwe, were of Aboriginal descent.<sup>4</sup> Moving either *alongside* or *in* it by foot, many chose the sands and the trails on the banks over the paved roads as their preferred route when moving to and from the Aboriginal communities on the outskirts of Alice. Furthermore groups, or 'mobs', of adult and elderly persons from the Aboriginal community, mostly males, settled in the shade of the red river gum trees in the riverbed. Forming circles in the sand of anything from three to around twenty persons, these groups fluctuated in size during the run of a day with persons drifting to and fro.<sup>5</sup> Perceived from the outside, the groups' main activity was talking, often in quite full voices. And although drinking alcohol in public is forbidden, drinking *did* take place, especially in the vicinity of the bottle shop. The social challenges facing the community in the riverbed, which include violence related to substance abuse, was perceived as a threat to the upholding of both 'whitefella' and Aboriginal law.

### **Sacred sites**

The level of stability of the topographic features of the landscape in and around Lhere Mparntwe qualify it as *place* in de Certeau's sense of the term. Once again, however, we are dealing with features that carry different meanings to different segments of the population. In order to illustrate this, one only needs only to examine the selectively foregrounded topographic references on the town map of Alice Springs. The only feature found worthy of mention is Anzac Hill with its memorial raised in 1934 to commemorate Australia's losses in World War One. If we perceive the same terrain

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<sup>3</sup> I am using 'whitefella' in reference to the title of Germaine Greer's book "Whitefella Jump Up. The Shortest Way to Nationhood" (2003). Coined as a slang word by Australia's indigenous population about the colonizers, Greer's use of the term suggests looking to Aboriginal Australia in order to find solutions to current social, political and environmental challenges.

<sup>4</sup> According to the 2001 census, the Aboriginal Australian population counted 17% or 4,912 persons of the total population of Alice Springs (28,178). By comparison the total resident indigenous population of Australia amounted to under 500,000 persons, or 2,4% of the Australia's population.

<sup>5</sup> On the riverbanks were seated other groups with a higher ratio of women and children than in the riverbed.

through the knowledge of the Traditional Owners of the land, almost every imaginable outspring in and around the riverbed, including some of the vegetation, bear a name.<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting on the terminology with which issues of space and place are narrated, de Certeau suggests that maps and itineraries constitute opposite ends of an experiential continuum as two symbolic or anthropological languages.<sup>7</sup> The depiction of a given terrain in topographical maps is a commonly used means of totalizing space by reducing it to a two-dimensional representation. Contrary to this practice Arrernte understanding of place is configured as a narration of itineraries relating to the deeds of the ancestral creators. It holds that the most powerful concentrations of the spirit ancestors' powers are to be found, where they created a landform by leaving object behind, entering the ground or raising trees such as the red river gums.<sup>8</sup> A number of these bounded areas, which to the Arrernte provide a cosmological link between the present and the times of primordial creation, are today registered 'sacred sites' with the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authorities.

An example: One of the first places visited by a particularly famous group of ancestral beings, the Mt. Zeil mob of caterpillars when they spread into the Lhere Mparntwe riverbed, was a rock outcrop in the riverbed by the foot of Anzac Hill. Today these rocks represent the creators, who not only fed and camped there, but also painted themselves and established the ceremonial law by which people in the future would ensure the continuation of the species. (Brooks 1991: 24) The site, which has no spectacular features to the immediate eye, is guarded with much affection and care. In fact, some years ago, the Henley-on-Todd, an annual 'whitefella' festival, which took place in the riverbed close to the rock outcrop of Antnelkentyarliweke, was shifted downstream as a result of pressure by the Traditional Owners, who were concerned about the exposure of the site.

The sacred sites create an ordering system, which plays a pivotal role in the complex knowledge of place held by the Traditional Owners of the land. This understanding is further expressed in the centrality of the notion of 'country'. In

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<sup>6</sup> Such a rendering is found in the illustrations to Brooks, D. 1991 *A Town like Mparntwe. A guide to the Dreaming tracks and sites of Alice Springs* Jukurrpa Books

<sup>7</sup> deCerteau 119

<sup>8</sup> Ethnographer Diane Bell discusses this in an interview with Gregg Borschmann on the ABC Big Talk Programme: Songline Conversations 16 July 2006. A transcription of the interview was 10.02.2006 found on:

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bigideas/stories/2006/1685090.htm>

Aboriginal terminology 'country' always implies much more than a question of territorial boundaries. (See for example Dobson 2003) It includes the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with a geographical position. In this sense there is no 'wilderness' and certainly no 'outback', since every feature in the land is known through its implications.

Dance anthropologist André Grau, writing about the Tiwi in Northern Australia, notes how 'landscape is made flesh' in the sense that the geographical world is perceived as co-situated in the body. (Grau 2005:158) And as it was said in a meeting with the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, the Arrernte people also perceive the body as 'country'.<sup>9</sup> To destroy or damage a sacred site is therefore a serious offense, which threatens both the living and the spirit inhabitants of the land. (Rose 2001: 13) It is in this light that the concern to protect the sacred sites should be seen, not only in Lhere Mparntwe but on Aboriginal land as such. It is also in this light, that the decision to site the performance in the riverbed should be seen.

### **Bodyweather in the city and the desert**

The choice of Lhere Mparntwe as performance site was not made by the organizers of Alice Desert Festival. In fact they warned Tess de Quincey that it would be too difficult to perform there. To the choreographer, however, the complex nature of the site was part of the motivation behind the performance.

A more detailed look at the choreographer's artistic biography provides a context for not only her decision to perform in the riverbed, but also for her approach to site specificity: The foundations for de Quincey's choreographic practice was established during six years in Japan in the mid 1980s. As a student of Min Tanaka, she studied the training system of Bodyweather, and also performed as a member of his Mai-Juku dance company. Continuing her exploration of the training, which entails both physical and experiential dimensions, Bodyweather has remained at the core of her creative work. The practice is structured over bodily techniques, which enhance the dancers' access to a sensory response to their surroundings. It is therefore a training which lends itself well to site specificity and it is precisely these aspects of Bodyweather that de Quincey pursued in much her creative work.

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<sup>9</sup> Notes from meeting between Tess de Quincey, KV and Aboriginal Areas Protection Authorities, Alice Springs (August 19, 2005)

Bodyweather is structured over three core elements: *MB*, or muscle/bone, an aerobic and high energy training, which strengthens the body and extends its capacity and durability; *Manipulations* of limbs, joints and body tissue, partnered or individual; and *Ground Work*, also called *Image Work*, which explores the environment in- as well as outside the body. An important aspect of *Ground Work* is the use of timebased and durational exercises such as extremely slow movements (called 'dot Bisoku'), which alter the dancer's *perception of* and *response to* place. The dancers training in the riverbed were for example asked to move at the speed of 1 mm per second and then at 1 cm per second, alternating between the two speeds at 3-minute intervals. The goal of the exercise was not for the dancer to 'master' it in any outwardly recognizable style. Neither did it look for any personal interpretation or expression. The intention was rather to strip away habitually, psychologically, and emotionally structured layers in order to allow the dancer's body to connect with place from its complex depths of tissue, organs, bones and fluids.

Other parts of the training apply images and dynamic qualities of the environment simultaneously to different parts of the body. The way in which the multifocused embodiment of the land became articulated in the performance of *Dictionary of Atmospheres* may be illustrated by the images called 'Barb Spine' and 'Wind Chatterings':

'Barb Spine', which relates to the climbing through a barbed wire fence, is described in the choreographic notes through a sequence of layered images with the following definition: "Spine 90 degrees (flat back) legs straight, chin towards chest, fingers echoing sense of wire. Small steps. Into vertical position; arms parallel and up; twisting from tips of fingers to soles of feet." A very different sequence is described the image 'Wind Chatterings': "Led by the knees, the feet operating very quickly, the scurries of wind are painted. Pelvis is relaxed and follows. Head and torso loose and relaxed, with very minimal movement. Arms move from behind the back asymmetrically to the eyes, holding secret quartz stones."<sup>10</sup>

For the past 15 years, a major strand in Tess de Quincey's work has been engaged with site specificity in the sense of exploring the dancing body in response to site in both urban and rural or more precisely desert Australia. With regards to the city, an emblematic example is the performance series *Compression 100*, which took

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<sup>10</sup> Tess de Quincey: Choreographic notes. *Dictionary of Atmospheres / Quartz Flow* (unpublished)

place in 164 different locations in Sydney in the month of May 1996. Tess de Quincey and Stuart Lynch, her collaborator at the time, asked “Can a city be danced?” and “To what extent do artists form the shape, sound and feeling of a city?” The answers were pursued together with musicians, visual artists, poets, sculptors, astronomers and other specialist practitioners.<sup>11</sup>

The choreographer has retrospectively remarked, how each site and each encounter presented a different ‘contract’, which was defined by the matrix formed by the geography, textures, speed, the intent and reality of the architecture, the history, the inhabitants and their expectations. Furthermore she has described the experience of the effects of the high number of performances, between three and six every day, as a ‘hyperflow’ or a ‘hyper-performance state’.<sup>12</sup> Whether on a beach or a bridge, in an aquarium, a book store, a cemetery, a club, a highway, a jail, a kindergarden, a pool, a mall, a private home or perhaps a zoo, every new performance was created in response to a new multilayered context. (See Vedel 1996) In other words, while each site posed unique challenges to the artists through the sum of the particular components, their response to the assemblage, relied on a repertory of corporeal techniques, which had been developed through their practice in *Bodyweather*.

Writing on the historical transformation of the notion of site specificity in visual and installation arts, James Meyer recently introduced a distinction between ‘functional’ and ‘literal’ sites. (Meyer 2000: 24) In contrast to the literal site, which he defines as an intransient, actual and a singular place, he defines the functional site as a process and an operation occurring *between* sites. Underlining the temporary, mobile and allegorical character of the functional site, this definition lends itself well to the approach to site specificity taken by Tess de Quincey. The ‘mapping’ of the site, on which her choreographic approach relies, extends itself far beyond the physical features of the actual place to include also institutional, historical, ideological, social and cosmological characteristics.

The line of de Quincey’s works in the desert was initiated in the early 1990’s with her investigation of the body as a ‘landscape within the landscape’ of the dried

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<sup>11</sup> De Quincey, T. 2002 *Sites of Multiplicity & Permeation* SITE FORUM: The Environment - The Site <http://www.bodyweather.net/siteforum.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> same as above



out Lake Mungo.<sup>13</sup> For the context of the performance of *Dictionary of Atmospheres*, an even more important articulation of her explorations into the relationship between the body and the desert were three interdisciplinary laboratories called Triple Alice.<sup>14</sup> Situated on an abandoned homestead turned into a youth camp, these labs took place on the banks of a(nother) dried out riverbed appr. 100 km north west of Alice Springs.<sup>15</sup>

Mirroring de Quincey's choreographic approach to site specificity in the city, the Triple Alice labs devised a temporary as well as spatial structure, which facilitated an investigation of the environment. A recurring component was the collaboration with local visual artists (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) as well as talks and walks, guided by persons with special knowledge about the area. One such person was the Traditional Owner of the land, on which the cattle station had been built. Other specialists consulted during the three laboratories provided insights from the perspectives of history, anthropology, meteorology and ethnobotany.

A recurring feature in the three labs was the daily training in Bodyweather, which served as a starting point for the dancers' embodied exploration of the premises as place. Carried over from the second to the third lab was also the daily performance format, in which material developed from the explorations of place led to small presentations of work or ideas in progress. The observations made in the exploratory work were reflected in journals kept by the individual participants, the performances were also videotaped and discussed at the end of each day. Through these snippets of site specific improvisations and their reflection, the group of scholars, actors, dancers, writers, and performance artists from various disciplines collaborated in a 'sensory mapping of place'.

Posited in the continuum between maps and itineraries, the complex processes of the 'mappings' conducted by De Quincey Co function less as privileging of selective features in a representationally fixed format than as an open matrix. As such they function as a part of the creative process, in which a wealth of information is made accessible from which the performers source in performance.

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<sup>13</sup> Lake Mungo, which is in the World Heritage listed Willandra Lakes Region, is the site for the oldest human finds in Australia, a man and a woman estimated to be appr. 40.000 years old. The woman is the oldest known person in the world to have been ritually cremated.

<sup>14</sup> The Triple Alice labs, lasting each between two and three weeks, took place in 1999, 2000 and 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Hamilton Downs Youth Camp is administered by the regional government of Northern Territory.

### Siting the performance

The definition of site specificity offered by theatre scholar Nick Kaye calls attention to the coming-into-being of both place and art work through *erasure*, a process he also describes as “the writing of non-place over place”. (Kaye 2000: 215) Looking at the creative processes involved in the interaction between the performers and not only the physical place, but also the extended matrix provided by the functional site, I suggest that in the performance of Dictionary of Atmospheres meanings, already inherent in the site, became *reconfigured* rather than erased.

When talking about siting or placing a work of (visual) art in ‘neutral’ void of a gallery or museum, the verb used is to *install*. (Suderburg 2000: 4) Constituting a genre in contemporary art *installation* is used about an art practice, in which the site becomes primary to the content of the work in such a way that it takes note of the particular venue and its parameters. The manner in which choreographic material, which went into the performance of Dictionary of Atmospheres was transferred from the dried out riverbed of Hamilton Downs to the dried out riverbed of Lhere Mparntwe may be discussed in similar terms as an installment or installation. This process, may however, be further broken down into a double action of *embodiment* and *emplacement*. Not only did the dancers of De Quincey Co rekindle choreographic material, such as for example Silica Tales, from memories stored on paper and in the intelligence of the flesh as they *emplaced* it in the new terrain. They were equally engaged in *embodying* the complexities of the extended performance site. The corporeal information with which they grappled in Lhere Mparntwe became filtered through insights into Arrernte cosmologies, the day-to-day social and spatial practices in and around the riverbed as well as personal encounters with individuals of the place.

In the context of Dictionary of Atmospheres, the dancers’ dual process of embodiment/emplacement was supported by structural procedures on behalf of De Quincey Co. The most formal of these were initiated long before arrival in Alice Springs in a written request to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, asking their permission to perform in the riverbed. Attached to the legal document, which granted De Quincey Co the permission, was a marked map and a number of aerial photos, showing the registered sacred sites. The certificate issued by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority also included a detailed outline of the conditions under which the

dance performance in Lhere Mparntwe could take place. Here it was stressed, that we were under no circumstance to perform in the vicinity of sacred site below Anzac Hill with the rocky outcrop and its associated trees.

Through additional arrangements with a corporation acting on behalf of the Traditional Owners, the performance and its audience were officially 'welcomed to country' in a short performative speech on the opening night.<sup>16</sup> By maintaining daily contact with the bodies representing the interests of the Aboriginal community, the company connected to the political structures sustaining Lhere Mparntwe as a place of significance.

A less formal, but equally important connection was made to the people, whose daily lives were temporarily affected by the presence of the dancers and others associated with the production.<sup>17</sup> Starting rehearsals in about a kilometre's distance from the hub of Aboriginal social activity, the members of De Quincey Co arrived in the riverbed on foot at around the same time every day. As part of the daily routines the company started by meeting in a circle in the sand. Before proceeding into the area in which the day's work took place, the sand was cleansed from litter, which could hurt the performers, such as metal scrap, glass and other sharp items. Every day there was some level of contact between the dancers and the other persons in the riverbed, ranging from the sharing of tea and fragments of life stories to greetings in the passing by. The dancing was commented, questioned and on occasion joined by individuals. Through these exchanges there was established a sense of sharing the same space which grew as the days went by.

The activities of De Quincey Co added new spatial practices to those already existing in the riverbed. On one occasion, as the company talked over the 'run thru' at

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<sup>16</sup> The words of the Arrernte welcome, that was performed by the representative from Lhere Artepe, were as follows: "Anwerne Mparntwe-arenye tyerrtye mapele arrenhantherre welcome-ileme apmere anwerne-kenhe-werne. Anwerne ahentye-aneme arrantherre akaltye-irremele respectem-ilettyeke apmere nhenhe". (We, the people who belong to Alice Springs, welcome you to our country. We hope you will learn about, and respect our country. We, the people who belong to Alice Springs)

[http://www.alicesprings.nt.gov.au/about\\_alice/aboriginal.asp](http://www.alicesprings.nt.gov.au/about_alice/aboriginal.asp) (10.02.2007)

<sup>17</sup> The number of persons in the production crew was for the first two weeks limited to from five to ten persons, while there were no props and no technology in the riverbed. In the last days of rehearsals and during the five days of performance, we raised three screens and draw cables to supply the projectors and lamps with power. This equipment was always removed again after a few hours.

the end of the day, a man, who had been watching the rehearsal from a group seated nearby, came over to announce: "I see what you say, I like what I hear. You crack me up!" While the response from Aboriginal persons in the riverbed ranged from appreciative over curious to indifferent, the reactions from 'whitefellas' passing by were often apprehensive, if not directly hostile. "Getalife you fuckin'hippies!" was shouted at us more than once by kids on their way from school.

### **Dancing someone else's country**

Tess Quincey's siting of *Dictionary of Atmospheres* in Lhere Mparntwe called attention to the vulnerability of 'country' in the Aboriginal sense of the word. Asking the rhetorical question: Is there an ethical way to be on a land that is not one's own? the performance was made with a strong awareness that the site was someone else's country. Of paramount importance was the respect for the sacred sites, stipulated in the guidelines of the certificate issued by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authorities. By performing in the riverbed where, contrary to for example in Sydney, the marks of the ancestral creators on the land have remained visible, the performance pointed to the complex layers of not only the particular site but of basically any potential performance site in Australia.

The laws, by which the sacred sites were protected, defined an *ethical space*<sup>18</sup> within which the terms of the performance were stipulated. The interhuman space, in which the members of the company operated in the riverbed, was a different matter on which there existed no manual - just like there is no manual for the ways in which to co-exist in Australia as such.

The four performances of *Dictionary of Atmospheres*, which were given free of charge, drew a substantial audience that was largely comprised of resident 'whitefellas' and tourists. As for the Aboriginal persons in the riverbed, who were well acquainted with the performance by the time of the premiere, the tendency was to either withdraw to the riverbanks or to remain in the periphery of what for a little more than an hour became a performance site. On one occasion, however, a group of

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<sup>18</sup> On the notion of *ethical space*, as a place defined by *symmetrical* relations between indigenous and Western knowledge systems and applied in cross-cultural activity, see Ervine, W. 2005 *Ethical Space. Transforming Relations* Discussion papers. National Gatherings on Indigenous Knowledge, Canada. NB I am indebted to Jerry Longboat for pointing me to this paper.

Aboriginal men remained seated in a spot in the riverbed that was on the performers' itinerary. Not until the dancers reached them and proceeded to dance next to them, did they get up. While the group retrieved to the bank of the river, one man remained, entering into a movement dialogue with performers, and as they moved on, he took a bow before the audience.

The reception was generally positive. Even the festival organizers, who applauded Tess de Quincey after the last performance, retrospectively acknowledged her for having stayed with the decision to work in the riverbed in spite of their objections. For the performers as well as the production crew, the combination of the different factors added up to a humbling experience, which was reflected both in the conversations within the group and in the performance. The details of the contract posed by this particular site posed, remained excessive to any attempt to contain it in a matrix.

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