

Whispering Limbs: A brief inhabitation of the senses

Whispering limbs was a dance performance that gestured towards identity and place as a series of liminal cultural boundaries. The performance's creative development involved an intensive period within a short temporal window. In openness to an exterior world, the principal collaborators immersed themselves into the natural features of a rural area in far north Queensland, Australia. These features included a remote river and forested areas where shared sensation-based experiences consolidated the ensembles purpose.

The forest was a place of diversity. Trees stood tall, their limbs stretching through other limbs. The scene was described in terms of competition and survival, but it was also described in terms of co-presence and hybridity—the kind of hybridity found between a wasp and orchid—Inter-species dependency. The dancers bodies were touching the forest's surfaces, immersing themselves in the river's waters. It was a place where waters met, the Indigenous peoples name for this place had that meaning. The forest and the river, the space of habitation—was invasive—invaded by introduced species. *Tamarindus indica* dominated an area, the human consumption of tamarind believed to have been the cause of its distribution throughout the tropical zones of the globe—via the Indian subcontinent—over a thousand or so years from its origins in tropical Africa (Dialio et al. 2007). *Delonix regia*, a tree near threatened in its endemic Madagascar (Rivers 2014) shoots a flamboyant display of red flowers through the forest canopy at the end of each year—a flame tree. *Eucalyptus leptopheleba*—box wood— with their tall white trunks gave a timeless endemic impression to the banks of the river.

The inhabitation was an amalgam of other places and identities, it was a remote place but no longer an Indigenous place—even as the Kuku-Muluridji People identify it as tribal lands their language dialect was threatened (Dixon 2002). The place was an in-between zone of ghosts and alterity, a shared liminality between Indigenous storylines and postcolonial human existence. The infection of identity layered its landscape. This place became a heterogeneous human

garden characteristic of the incursions that have traversed its ecology. The immersion of the dancers—like the Chinese itinerant market gardener who was said to have occupied the place a century earlier (Toohey 1994: 162)—are a layer of cultural claiming at this place. The dancers movements—responded to whatever was becoming of the place—ritualised the co-presence of their agency, for that moment, in a spatialization of fiction, identity and place. For a moment, the dancers were the place and the place moved through them. The boundaries of identity and place faltered and it was here that “borders and boundaries are by nature placeless” (Hill & Paris 2006: 152).

The openness of the exterior and the however-brief inhabitation of it by the senses located us in a conscious co-presence of the now. In striking alterity, the architectures of practice and the simulacra of art located us in the subconscious of fiction no matter how naturalistic or abstract the simulation intended. This was the suspension of disbelief in the desert of the real (Žižek 2002). Either an allusion to identity *or* place, there remained a failure to identify the geography (Broinowski 1992: 14). *Whispering Limbs* was art that offered a set of symbolic coordinates from which the poetic real-fiction—perhaps the surreal—was interpreted. The artists were not neutralizing the audience, but not rampant with narrative cohesion either. There was an inscription already alive within the limbs of the dancers, within the intertextuality reliant on the experience of reading the dancers body. The audience was charged with authorship in the interpretation of the dancers movements. The whispering relationship of cultural identity and place was determined through reading the performing body in action. The shared technique of contemporary dance was the ensembles movement vocabulary however, it appeared ostensibly optional and a deliberate interruption in the interpretation of their presence.

Collocating the techniques of media mixing and intermediality within the exchanges of intercultural identity and place, the creative development produced unpublished moving image and photomedia concurrently with choreographic development and scenographic design presented in the work.

Whispering Limbs was performance collaboration between Cairns-based duo Bonemap, Brisbane-based dance trio Polytoxic, Indigenous Cairns-based dancer Earl Rosas and Townsville-based sound artist Steven Campbell. Bonemap's foundation artists, Rebecca Youdell and Russell Milledge, facilitated the project. Through the lens of inter-cultural collaboration, the work placed the dancers in a sweep of surreal panoramic landscapes, where they explored a range of contemporary themes within a highly integrated, immersive and improvised performance arena. Devised within two weeks and presented over three nights during the 2009 Cairns On Edge Contemporary Media and Performance Festival, *Whispering Limbs* presented a cultural mix of Indigenous, Polynesian and Caucasian performance aesthetics.

The inter-cultural choreography within the work was supported through pre-recorded and live improvised image projections and sound. As noted by Gallasch (2009) "the collective power of the work...is reinforced by Russell Milledge's sweeping diorama projections that reveal the performers in an almost gothic natural world, and by Steven Campbell's percussive electronic score, mixed live." Similarly, Carless (2009) comments "[Whispering Limbs] evokes issues and images of spirituality, ecological sustainability, transformation and doubling, generating a metaphysical whirlpool of ideas and images. The media components integrate with the physical performance perfectly to produce a work that is part dark ritual, part mad hatter's tea party."

Reference List

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