

domenico de clario

tonglen*: towards morning (for n.s.)

east point gun turret, darwin, australia

from 6.43 (sunset) august 9 2006 until 6.52 (sunrise) august 10 (full-moon 3.37 am august 10)

in may 2006 i accompanied steve eland, director of darwin's *24 hour-art* gallery, on a trip through arnhem land, visiting the communities at *oenpelli* and *maningrida*.

this journey and my subsequent responses constituted the first part of an un-named performance project *24-hour art* had invited me to present for the darwin festival.

the country we travelled through had been devastated by a recent cyclone, and my first experience of both moving through this landscape and meeting the people living in its communities deeply affected me; after some months of reflection **tonglen: towards morning** is the consequence.

during those few days in arnhem land i was continuously confronted with both causes and effects of transformation, transmutation, and inevitably, transcendence.

on my return to darwin i visited the gun turret located at east point.

this structure was built during the last years of the second world war as a protection from an expected japanese invasion, but its two guns, the largest ever built in australia, never fired a shot and both the guns and the australian warships sunk in the harbour by japanese air raids were sold and shipped back to japan only a few years ago, as scrap iron for smelting.

alchemy and transmutation; i realised that the turret and its history seemed to symbolise many aspects of what i had just experienced in arnhem land, and that the energy in this location might coherently contextualise a series of questions about the nature of transmutative journeys.

some weeks after my return to melbourne noel sheridan**, already gravely ill, died in perth on the morning of the full-moon of july 12, a few days before my scheduled visit to see him for what would have been the last time.

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the journey towards morning begins at sunset on the night of august 9; the full-moon's sensitising influence facilitates awareness of what normally might be inaudible and invisible.

the turret structure at east point is circular, dome-like, and the pit in which the gun swivelled is entered through a tunnel; a keyboard is now placed in the centre of this pit.

the turret is a body, holding within it a series of seven energy points lit by appropriate coloured light; this body can be approached and entered at will, and its memory can be engaged with.

someone (it could be any one of us) sits at the keyboard through the august 9 full-moon night, touching the keys.

the sitter and keyboard together function as a receiving/transmitting antenna, and the inaudible is transmuted through the sitter's body into sound.

the centre of the pit no longer functions as a gun turret, but becomes a space from which inaudible sound is transmuted into another language, reverberating around and around the inner skin of the earth-and-concrete mound, the inner skin of its throat.

the ocean can be heard nearby rolling into east point; birds make night sounds.

inside, silently projected on the inner skin of the tomb-like mound above the sitter are the subtitled versions of pier paolo pasolini's *edipo re (oedipus rex)*, his *gospel according to st. matthew*, luchino visconti's *la terra trema* and ingmar bergman's *the seventh seal*.

these soundless narratives projected side by side accompany the sitter's journey towards morning; as they merge in the centre of a curved wall they describe the complexity of an ongoing struggle between engagement and non-engagement.

each of the narratives' main characters moves inexorably towards death, yet before succumbing to oblivion each is determined to uncover the relationship between death and the reason for being.

the essence of this relationship might consist of the discovery that our brief lives not so much move inexorably towards death, but perhaps towards a new morning, towards another beginning.

the invitation for visitors to **tonglen: towards morning** is to simply sit, stand or move around the turret and its surrounds observing the world unfolding around them, perhaps breathing in the difficulty in one's life, and breathing out ease as the full moon rises in the sky, the ocean meets the land, birds' voices and wind in the trees can be heard as narratives are silently unfolding on the curved wall above the sitter, describing endless movements between being and non-being.

in the sky the moon moves towards its setting, and the sun prepares to appear once more.

nothing further is required, and the purpose of this offering is not to add anything new to the world, but simply to facilitate a greater engagement with what already is; what is here is enough!

to attentively undertake this journey might then facilitate an apocalypse (from the greek *apocalypsis*, meaning to reveal) as a seemingly impenetrable reality perhaps suddenly gives way if only for an instant, in order to reveal a simple and illuminating truth; we must always be read for this truth to appear, for we know it's all gone in no time.

the last paragraph from samuel beckett's '*That Time*' ***(*Collected Shorter Plays*, 1967):

'not a sound only the old breath and the leaves turning and then suddenly this dust whole place suddenly full of dust when you opened your eyes from floor to ceiling nothing only dust and not a sound only what was it said come and gone was it something like that come and gone come and gone in no time gone in no time'

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thank you steve eland, *24-hour art*, the darwin festival, the arnhem land communities of oenpelli and maningrida and georgette louise forbes

the east point gun turret sits on larrakia land and i acknowledge and thank its present indigenous owners and their ancestors.

**tonglen*: the tibetan buddhist term describing the process thought to be the most valuable one can undertake: with each in-breath take in distress and difficulty, and with each out-breath release ease.

**noel sheridan* (dublin 1936 - perth 2006); artist, arts administrator and writer; inaugural director of the *experimental art foundation*, adelaide (1975-79); inaugural director of *perth institute of contemporary art* (1988-93) and director of the *national school of art and design*, dublin from 1980-88, and from 1993-2004).

***performed by noel sheridan on june 21 2006 at *spectrum project space* in perth, as part of *the round ball game*

tonglen: towards morning is dedicated to the memory of noel sheridan