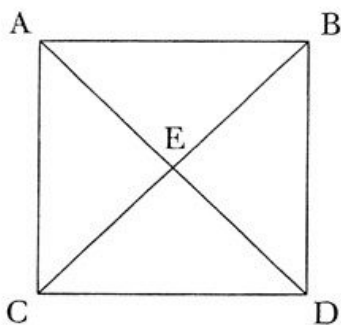


DESERT WALKER
Motherboard 2007-08
Project description

Desert Walker is an experimental performance that investigates the extremities of human space/time perceptions. It will take place on the desolate salt flats of Utah and Nevada, USA. It is inspired by 'Quad' - the first in a series of minimalist experimental television plays made by Samuel Beckett in the 1980s for the broadcaster Süddeutscher Rundfunk.

Quad is performed as a serial game involving the motional pattern of four simultaneous solos. Four cloaked performers, whose coloured hoods make them identifiable yet anonymous, perform a relentless closed-circuit choreography on a white square. Once inside the square, they monotonously and synchronously pace the respectively 6 steps of the lengthwise and diagonal lines it contains. The mathematical precision and choreography is made possible by the exactness of the timing. Choreographic variation is confined to the number of performers, and the resultant changes in colour constellations. The middle of the square, which is marked by a dot, must always be bypassed on the left-hand side. In the course of the performance, the feet leave behind faint traces on the diagonals of the white square. It takes approximately 8-12 minutes to perform the piece.



The sequences of movement are:

Sequence 1: AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA

Sequence 2: BA, AD, DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB

Sequence 3: CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD, DB, BC

Sequence 4: DB, BC, CD, DA, AC, CB, BA, AD

Desert Walker involves attempting to perform 'Quad' on the salt flats that surround Wendover, a small town on the edge of mountains and salt flats, located at the point where the Basin and Range of Nevada spill into the Great Salt Lake Desert of Utah, USA. A desolate place of barren rock and white alkali, Wendover is a place where "no person would want to live". It is a stop-over place for people driving from New York to San Francisco, and is bisected by the state line. On the one side lies the remains of the gambling boom town of Nevada's Wendover, while the Utah half is dominated by the remains of an Airbase abandoned in 1977. It is here that The Center for Land Use Interpretation (CLUI, Los Angeles) has established the Wendover Residency Program and The American Land Museum. CLUI's desert centre will be our base and its surrounding area our stage.

The Airbase was established at the beginning of WWII to train bomber crews, including the Enola Gay team. As a consequence, between 1940-50 the surrounding area was bombed, ripped and splattered with chemical and biological agents. The military still holds some 3 million acres of restricted testing ground, while large-scale industries remove salt and process minerals from the flats, and extract copper and gold from the mountains. The residues and relics of both (undocumented) military and industrial activity can be found scattered around the almost uninhabitable landscape.

The barren landscape can, on first site look like a place of beauty, untouched by humans. Its vastness can be physically and psychologically disorientating, disrupting all perspective of space and time. Under certain weather conditions, and at one point on the playa, it is possible to see the earth bend on the horizon. The climate, which has been described as "weather on drugs" is another aspect to be contended with. Boiling in the summer, freezing in the winter and with long periods of stable moderate conditions in between. However, violent rain storms and hurricanes can suddenly

occur at any time of the year.



L-R: Nevada Test Site (nuclear), Aptus Hazardous Waste Insinerator, Great Salt Lake

Desert Walker will be staged on the salt flats. The stage/box will be extended to almost as far as the eye can see. Beckett's 6 steps along the diagonals and periphery of the square will be multiplied by 111, to make 666 for each line trodden. The questions that arise (at least those we can think of now) are:

What happens when metres extend to kilometres?

Can the walkers keep synchronized in such a vast, open space?

Will the walkers disappear from view (of each other) and manage to keep going?

How will the desert conditions - temperature, fatigue, thirst, mirages, etc) affect them?

Will dancers, whose fitness and precise, almost mystical ability to keep track of time and space, be more prepared for the mission than other performers?

Where will the drama of Desert Walker lie, compared to Beckett's original work?

Will the centre still be the point of danger as in Quad?

Will it lie on the periphery of the square, or in the emotional experiences of the walkers and the rest of the crew?

How long will it take to perform the piece?

As there are not many people in Wendover to witness the performance, documentation is important. Save a few footprints in the desert it is perhaps all that will remain of the performance once it is over. But how can such a piece be documented that reveals something about the essence of the performance?

The current idea is to document the performance from two points of vision;

1. Objective/total view using and a camera high up in the sky on a helium/weather balloon. This high-angle view-point is similar to how Beckett himself filmed 'Quad'.
2. Subjective, panoramic view using a rotating camera at the centre of the square.

In addition, the process and experience of the involved parties will be documented by conducting video interviews.

Photo credits

Left and centre: CLUI data base.

Right www.legendsofamerica.com/CA-DonnerParty2.html