

Space on Par

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A short performance for one performer.

Abstract: *Space on Par* is a short performance text that uses gentle humour to communicate an alternative perspective on how open space is used by humans and nonhuman animals, in this instance a golf course. If playing golf for enjoyment is puzzling behaviour for a nonhuman observer, it can emphasise human refusal to recognise the physical and spatial rights of other species and their needs for survival. The effort to educate about the treatment of animals can include theatrical characters who blur the species identities to make a point, and *Space on Par* inverts the invisibility of the gaze of the human.

Keywords: performance, kangaroo, animal

Space on Par

A short satirical text for human instruction

Performer one appears doing security work on a golf course.

(Optional: Performer two is a golfer who passes by at regular intervals and does not speak.)

A background image of a golf course possibly with a glimpse of two kangaroos in the distance. Sound effects could indicate a golf course and birds.

Performer one stands with his back to the audience. Performer one freezes and then ducks suddenly covering his head. He rises slowly and turns the head and upper chest around.

How's your pulse today? Nothin' like a good skip or ... a scare to get that pulse going. Standing around can make the heart beat lazy, and that's what I do. Stand around for security. Boundary security. I look out for the first sign of trouble.

(Performer two passes across the stage wheeling a golf bag.)

I've seen big changes in my time. I'm kept busy warning our group about boundary breaches. I'm happy to report we haven't lost anyone recently. Some days, I have help. Joe, my sister's eldest, has proved himself. I say, 'Joe, the future for us is in security'. *[Pause.]* We don't want anyone knocked down, hurt or ... worse during a breach. Strangers come at us from all directions as if they don't see the boundaries. Young Joe gets edgy whenever anyone crosses open space. *[Disgusted tone.]* Strangers pass when the sun is overhead as if they don't know any better.

Once the gum trees were thick through here, and long grass plentiful. But I'm not complaining. Short green grass is soft. We like passing the time here, eating, snoozing, lying about, and keeping an eye out for what Joe and the younger ones are up to. They single out poor Joe. He's

got to worry about his mates as well as boundary breaches. [*Performer looks to the side suddenly.*]

Hello, looks like fun, one of the young toughs taking on Joe. Don't like his chances.

[*Calling out.*] Careful Joe. Pretend to go for the head or throat but only as a diversion. Punch to the right or the left or the top of the chest, if you must. You don't want to lay him out for good. No one would let you forget that, ever. Show him you're in charge, step around, move away ... that's it ... Good lad.

[*Pause.*] (*Performer one watches Performer two pass.*)

You can't be too careful. Strangers can be very sneaky. Even the regulars are tricky with their brightness that strains the eyes. [*Pause.*] I remember times when we lost a family member with next to no warning. No fight, no chance to defend ourselves. From nowhere a loud bang or a thud and suddenly one of us lies cold. Gone. I mean you could accept a fair fight going wrong. A one-to-one fight is par for the course.

I can see one of the young bloods in the extended family has reached *that* age. [*Sighs.*] It's in the body language. You see everyone around stand still, prick up their ears. Young ones looking to shake things up. They're keen coming closer and closer. At a glance, I can see what's going on and a knowing look can stop them before they get in close. But if they continue then someone has to step up. There are two main options at this point and I'm no hero. [*Pause.*] Perhaps that's why I've survived and others haven't. Mind you, once I could easily outrun them. I leave raising the dust to Joe these days.

I say to Joe when we stand watching out. [*Spoken in a fatherly tone.*] 'Take my advice, there's scope for a spar or two without getting serious. There's a good chance your opponent is simply out for some fun today. A fight for fun. Be respectful and play back. A gentle push and shove

each, and it's all over. A fun spar can be very entertaining. We all remember when we were younger, passing the time with family, eating, snoozing, lying about and ... fighting.'

[*Pause.*] 'One punch to the heart can be fatal. Trust me. One full hard blow and your opponent lays you out. No more daydreaming with blue sky above and delicious green grass under foot.' Fighting shouldn't be allowed, you say. [*Pause.*] I tell Joe if you don't know how your opponent is going to fight, the best strategy is to take off, and out-run him. 'Flee at top speed, twenty-five "ks" at least. Avoid pathways that look easy. Head in among those gums and you'll soon lose them. You'll have the advantage of surprise.' Joe has always been fast, right from when he was young.

(Performer two passes through again.)

Performer drops fatherly tone for this sentence.] I am obliged to give Joe and the others hints about fighting. I've known them since they first crawled out. I've seen plenty of fights in my time. [*Uses coaching tone.*] If your opponent is serious, and you must stand your ground, there are some basic principles. First protect your vulnerable parts. Your heart. Keep your front arms up, pull your head right back and try to get a blow in low on your opponent's body. Be sure to take a rest between moves. Your goal is to land a good hard kick in the lower body before your opponent does. Remember, fighting needs to be carried out honourably as everyone is watching. And it should be all over in about ten minutes.

[*Watching the action.*] Watch out Joe. That young tough is back. It's all on again. It's the kick that counts. No scratching. A tear to the flesh and it's over. Careful, careful. Don't rush in. Ease yourself into the right standing position. That's it. Now don't wait too long. Ouch. You got him. There, that kick should settle it. He won't try that again for a while. What! [*Increasing pace.*] He's getting his own kick through now. Joe? Joe? Are you winded? You're right, that's it.

[*Pause.*] You're not coming back for a second? Not this time? Never mind. Today looks like you're the loser, Joe, so approach him to groom. Do it properly. Everyone is watching not just old boomer here. Every winner needs to behave and let the loser bow and caress him in the right way. That's our boy, strokes at par. Nicely done. Joe's definitely got a future in security. He follows the time-honoured convention.

*Performer raises an elbow up and tries to scratch behind an ear. This should be the first clear physical clue of the species identity of the character played by the Performer.*¹

We like it here when it's quiet. The big hill gives shelter from the sea wind and it's still greener than anywhere else within three kilometres. Once we hung out all day long and roamed wherever we liked. Not anymore. We have to watch out and give ground. This is why keeping to the boundaries is so important. [*Pause.*] More and more strangers come too close. They amble around as if every day is a holiday. Some do stay at a good distance and just look through the wire. But there are always exceptions, noisy ones who come in close as if they are going to ... going to... I signal danger with a sharp 'whack' and get us out of the line of fire. Always hard to tell whether the day will be quiet or full of ear-splitting noises. Yes, I'm never sure how the day will go.

I've been coming to this place all my life. My mother brought me here as a baby. Back then, some of us used to dash at the wire, but you get used to the change and ... to loss. Now we follow the wire until there's a gap. I have every intention of coming here in old age, trouble or not. We haven't lost anyone recently, to glare or combat or wishful thinking.

(Performer two enters and stands looking out staring at Performer one.)

To tell you the truth, fights between our young ones are the least of my worries. These days we have one big problem towards the end of a day when stragglers don't leave when they should. Can't they tell it's our turn? We let them see we're waiting and watching, but they ignore us. It's our turn out on the open green space, so we just have to move in. They don't step back for us. It takes all my effort to nod in their direction, 'Look, there's plenty to go around if you keep your distance'. If you play fair.

Performer's body could reveal more of the kangaroo identity, knees bent, hands raised in front of the chest.

We can be generous to a point even though they don't seem to appreciate we're related. I do feel sorry for them, one by one, two by two, and no growing young. They mustn't be getting the food they need to climb out of the pouch. They move so slowly on those very small feet. Our feet give us the advantage to move fast and jump away.

(Performer does one jump in the direction of Performer two. Performer two steps backwards in a hurry and then exits.)

[Sighs.] There's nowhere we can go. There's food to eat here even in summer and *no* cattle. That's one big advantage for us. We don't have to share this valley with bovines. Mind you they keep the boundary distance between species and rarely cross into our territory. We can see what they eat all day. They eat relentlessly. But there is still a big issue, their emissions. The air smells when you end up downwind with their belching and farting all day long. Leave you gasping for fresh air. And too few gums to make a difference with the air. Not our favourite type, I can tell you.

I have to watch out for boundary breaches even while I'm eating. I like to savour each mouthful and prefer not to rush through a meal. It takes time to select the tenderest new grasses. There's

sand in the grass and it can get in the teeth. But that's progress for you. At least it's soft on the feet and on my old bottom. Grass and sand do make the best nests.

We don't eat those large round, white seeds that roll about in the green grass. They're inedible. They must be poisonous because the regulars and the strangers don't eat them either. They spend all their time hitting and throwing them far out of reach. Helpful, the way they push them up in the air with the birds. They use their long thin stalks, which are usually folded out of sight. Such very long arms must slow them down, too. If the regulars spent less time pushing those white seeds around and more time eating then surely they would have more young. And we'd have a bit more peace.

At least *we* can still move quickly. They don't eat around us. What do they eat? I mean they sweep good grass up or throw it around. True. I've seen it. I've seen what happens with all the loud noise and dazzle and glare they hide behind, food snatched away. You might say, [*whispering*] they're vandals with food. They could leave it for us. [*Pause.*] The seeds make a loud clank as they bounce off. Painful, even if it doesn't lay you out. It could have turned out differently. We might still be galloping away together like our common ancestor.

Night brings protection and ... risks. We must avoid bright lights. And loud noise. I can't even tell Joe the whispers I hear about those horrors; killing fields, and dead bodies. Our kind, broken up, crammed into cold boxes by the dozens...² But for what? I don't understand. Why would anyone do that! Can it be possible? Sometimes I don't know what to believe what they say about other types, other species.

The regulars ignore us. But who does protection for their boundaries, I wonder. Their security lets the strangers come up too close. One of our kind might be happily munching through a tasty morsel and a strange face or two suddenly appears right in front. I always advise taking off a little way and then looking back to gauge what's happening. You can always go back. It's not like they take over our food. That's why it's puzzling. With any boundary breach, it's knowing when to stand your ground or take off. But then if we flee in the rush, we might overlook a boundary somewhere else and cause alarm. I do my best but it takes all my attention. I wish everyone treated the boundaries between us with respect, keeping the safe distance. They don't seem to see the boundaries. They behave as if the whole world belongs to them.

They don't follow the rules. They are below par when they come in close. Those breaches get my pulse going every time. That's why I have to stand guard all day. I'm left no choice. I have to be ready to flee. They don't share this place on a par.

Notes

¹ See further information in Stephen Jackson and Karl Vernes, *Kangaroo*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2010.

² The international cheap meat trade in kangaroo meat has developed over the past decades with minimal regulation. There is insufficient science to accurately establish the population numbers of the kangaroo and wallaby species of Australia's national emblem (see <http://thinkkangaroos.uts.edu.au>).