



Triple Alice 1999, Body Weather Laboratory

photo Garry Seabrook

Triple Alice: catching the weather

Keith Gallasch talks with Tess de Quincey

Did the event meet your expectations?

I've always thought it would be a burning point and it did prove itself as that, the sense of what that land gives off and the kind of energy it seems to produce in people. Financially, the whole thing was carried by the workshop. We had about 45-50 people regularly throughout the 3 weeks. Then we had another crew on top of that of about 14 people and writers, theorists and then local artists who joined us for different periods. The workshop was fabulous. We had a lot of people coming from Europe and some from Japan. There was a good mixture of people from all over Australia, not just the capital cities but really from all over.

What was a working day like?

Breakfast was at 6. We had a cooking team led by a wonderful macrobiotic cook and then we started training at 8, which we changed to 7.30 because it was just getting too hot. Whew! Sun! Boiler! Sweat! Drip! Dust! Within the first half hour the dust level was just massive and we were thick with this heat. Body weather is a literal workout, working up a sweat, working through different areas of the body. There are a lot of aspects to do with co-ordination, plus group body and individual body, timing and that sort of thing. But the actual sense of working outside is always an enormous thing in terms of what it does to focus and perspective. To have to generate the energy to meet that environment, it's very big.

How do you establish the participants' relationship with the landscape?

Basically by asking them to use their focus in different ways. Asking, for instance

that the head travel and take in different relationships, to gauge what the eye is seeing without necessarily using point focus, to encourage a sense of scanning which is also to do with nomadic vision. Hunter-gatherers scan landscapes.

Then we'd move into manipulations, opening out and stretching and aligning the body. You're in couples working with breath, weight and alignment in a quite fixed series of forms, gradually learning to gauge different parameters of the body and how to change and push border lines. That's a much softer, quieter thing. So where the workout focuses and pulls in the body and contracts the muscles to a certain degree, this opens out the muscles and the borders. Then a lunch break and a rest in the heat of the middle of the day, to zonk out. But most people didn't sleep. They slowed down, wrote a lot of notes, did their logs on the bank of computers, because I wanted to look at how the experience could exist on the net through the performers responding to a set of questions.

The afternoon was what I call ground-work which is more to do with basically opening up sensitivity to different speeds, practising how perception is altered working with mimetic relation to trees, grass, stalks, different elements of the rocks.

What do you mean by mimetic here?

Taking the body of the tree into your own body in an empathetic sense, trying to take the imagination of the molecules of that object and transferring that so that one gauges a different sense of being.

Duration becomes very important...

A whole set of durational relationships

are established and worked through. One thing I wanted to do which I've never done before is to work 20 minutes regularly every day with slow movement, varying between one millimetre all the way up to 10 centimetres per second. I did that every day at about 2pm. I wanted to see what the effect would be.

We also did a lot of blind work and then, finally, the culmination of the workshop was in 2 elements. Firstly I asked people to put together small solos. They chose a particular place and they put together something that had a relationship to what they'd been doing over the 3 weeks. I let that stand as their individual investigation to get a relationship to the land. The other aspect was that I choreographed a series of exercises together, the effect of which was in a sense like a 20 minute performance. I was really happy with this because when I looked at it I thought, "Ah, we've caught the weather of the place! I had a really nice feeling about it. It felt absolutely, "ah yes, we got hold of it."

You had Indigenous people coming by. How did they respond to what you were doing?

It had been planned that we'd have 13 women from Yuendumu who were due to come but there were 2 deaths so there was sorry business and they just couldn't come at the last minute. I knew this might happen. So it was okay. We had a lot of discussions over the phone and so there's a movement forward, and they've now invited me to go hunting with them. The 2 women who did come out—very interesting artists based in Alice Springs—had a fantastic time. They had their kids out with them. They taught us

how to do some dot paintings and we did a communal painting together. It was more to do with talking. We set up social situations with the local artists, they came and visited mainly in the evenings and then they'd do slide showings of their work and we had a lot of poetry readings. We also had people who came as speakers—ethno-botanists, politicians, meteorologists, historians who know that area.

A lot of the local artists came and joined us which was very nice. The workshop was open to them if they wanted to join in. Some did and some stayed longer than others and were more engrossed in it. Then we did some collaborations. Watch this Space, the local artist-run co-operative in Alice Springs, were a major partner. A lot of their artists came up. They brought some of their installation materials and put them out in the land and then I concocted various relationships that the participants could enter into.

So what happens in stage 2?

We're holding on to the core of the local artists and then inviting interstate artists to come and collaborate. In the main we're looking at visual artists and particularly artists interested to work with the website. I won't do a public workshop. I just want to work with a smaller group of people who are doing a higher level of research at a more professional level. And I'd really like to move into another level entirely on the web to see what can happen with *Triple Alice* in this place and in virtual space.

Triple Alice, Hamilton Downs, September 20 - October 10, 1999. www.triplealice.net