



Tess de Quincey in collaboration with Pamela Lofts

photo Juno Gemes

Edge, desert, reticulation, information

Martin Harrison

The idea of representation (whether classically defined or ironised in a postmodern sense) is not what the Triple Alice project is about.

Certainly, it is an event which is taking place 'at the centre'—literally so, outside Alice Springs—and which thematically, too, is centred within a set of convergences and overlaps between disciplines, artforms, individuals and languages. In October 1999, it brought together Tess de Quincey's Body Weather workshop, a group of writers and critics, a large number of painters from Alice Springs, botanists, environmentalists and Indigenous artists together with a program of visiting speakers, politicians, musicians, all of whom were connected with and committed to the day-to-day affairs of the Northern Territory. But even with such a multi-form set of activities, criss-crossing over 3 weeks—all roughly related on a theme to do with local place and local environment—there was no intention to set up a representative 'space' in which the immediacy of locale could, or should, be embodied. If the experimental practice of the event was definitely locative, *Triple Alice's* understanding of locus was not, first off, about the representability of place, nor about its cultural appropriation and exclusiveness.

It's important to make that distinction. So much work that 'goes to' and 'comes from' the centre is about representation—about land, about race, about what constitutes a voice or a presence within evolving notions of country. Of course, the first, and highly tentative, attempt to mount *Triple Alice* links with these ideas. Yet if you were asked to provide some key terms for the event, then a suggestion would be that a series like *edge, desert, reticulation and information* provides better means for describing the intentions and the outcome of *Triple Alice* than any discussion of centre and margin could do. In this regard, there was no specific agenda for what could or might have occurred at

Hamilton Downs. The aim was to create an information site for participants—sure, a space for interaction. But it was also a means for acquiring knowledge about ground and land-form and the body's integration with them in the context of a post-industrial analysis of the nature of extremely arid country and the integration of technology with that country.

The events just mentioned were, in other words, not just arbitrarily poetic. The *Triple Alice* experiment grows from sustained discussions among a variety of artists and writers, with performer/choreographer Tess de Quincey and her work with Body Weather playing a leading role. The aim, expressed in those discussions, was to imagine an experimental event which would act as a 'think tank', a database and a rich and ongoing informatic process. What is an aesthetics, or more accurately a poetics, which responds to locale in Australia? What's a useful and productive notion of exchange and collaboration in the context of information technologies? What is 'thinking' and 'practice' at a moment when thought is (to borrow Gregory Ulmer's terms) conductive and associative and

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when the "writing of space" is the primary and yet necessarily inconclusive medium for expression? Ulmer's claim that contemporary legibility is a legibility "beyond representation"—in short, a category of the ontologically unspoken—was a powerful provocation in this first stage.

A Body Weather workshop—a workshop in which the intentionality of body position and movement are read in relation to land form, to earth, to stones, to heat, to wind—was the locus for many of the 50 or so participants. Each workshop was a mini-history of the senses, checked out in meditative and poised relationships not literally related to a dry creekbed or the caterpillar dreaming of the Chewing Ranges visible in the site's background, but where each participant was conscious of his or her position, autobiographical, intimate, externalised and inward.

The events were photographed and documented as part of a research project conducted through Ian Maxwell at Sydney University's Centre for Performance Studies. Other writers, artists and photographers intervened in and interacted with the event—photographer Juno Gemes, for example, writer and installation artist Kim Mahood, Alice Springs based artist Pamela Lofts. But there were many other visiting artists who observed or contributed, or simply made new work which criss-crossed with the site and the environment. Some like Ann Mosey or Rod Moss presented and talked about their work. Dorothy Napangardi and Polly Napangardi Watson painted with various members of the group.

Participants were also asked to post statements, texts and journal entries on the *Triple Alice* website. At the same time, this website was receiving information from writers and artists not at Hamilton Downs but who knew of *Triple Alice*. It was a first attempt at tracing an interactive history of the senses. There was no

'theme' but there was a version, enormously dispersed and many-sided, of a living 'topo-analysis' occurring.

As a third element, a small group came together in short seminars focused on current discourses of Australian place. Again there was a wish to keep the edges open in these discussions so that we could include discussion about performance theory, Bachelard's poetics, the work of intellectual historian Edward Casey, Gregory Ulmer's work in heuristics and the theorisation of desert, space and sense in J-L Nancy.

The dynamics—and installation of the necessary resource base—for such an event were obviously complex. The location itself, a drive 110 kilometres north-west of Alice, made sure of that. No-one knew if the open-ended terms—*edge, desert, reticulation and information*—would act as sufficient markers for the trajectory. Would we simply lose our way in the desert, in that place where, according to Jean-Luc Nancy (*The Sense of the World*, Uni Minnesota Press, 1997) there is "the end of sources, the beginning of the dry excess of sense?" In fact, *Triple Alice* was immensely information rich and 'sense' rich. It seems already to have become productive ground for a series of collaborative and individual projects which are occurring through this year. *Triple Alice 2000* will refine the interactive model of 'sites' within a site: performance, visual art, writing and the internet. And the collaborative excitement of working with local artists from the centre will continue.

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

Martin Harrison is currently working on a new collection of poetry, Summer and a collection of critical essays.