

Sir Don v The Ratpack

(Mapping the Performative Geography of a Latter Day ‘Happening’)¹

Paper for Australasian Drama Studies Conference 2009

This paper examines the creation and management of performance space in *Sir Don v. The Ratpack*, an item of agit-prop theatre produced by Mullumbimby’s Gorilla Street Theatre (GST) outside the Brisbane Convention Centre on the 26th of November, 2009. The performance was staged to coincide with the Annual General Meeting of BHP Billiton, the world’s largest mining company. Staged as a mock press conference, *Sir Don* was produced by a group of actors, activists and filmmakers drawn together by shared concerns about the huge expansion of uranium mining about to take place at Roxby Downs in South Australia. I argue that the ‘energy’ expressed in the polarised contest between actor/journalists seeking answers and the actor/chairman denying everything, creates a unique space of performance: effectively a heterotopia of alternate ordering. Like much site-specific practice, *Sir Don* is mobile, transgressive, and permeable. It unfolds in real time and its performative space is created and maintained by the act of pointing cameras and microphones towards a concentrated spot (the subject – Sir Don); who is thereby licensed to take this mobile scrum wherever he wants. Like the circle around a fight, this formation of spectatorship and participation can bend and extend, thicken and reform. It can even intercalate with the heterotopia of BHP’s AGM: a ritualized, annual gathering of (mostly small) shareholders. *Sir Don* also draws in the social space of the nearby ‘real demonstration’ – otherwise kept at a distance by a strong police presence. This latter day ‘Happening’ deploys itself as a third space which mediates the divide between both points of antagonism: effectively bringing the ‘real’ demonstration *into* the realm of the corporate meeting. An 8 minute video record of *Sir Don* can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDD1q_sjor0.

¹ In his seminal work on the subject, Michael Kirby defined a Happening as a “purposefully composed form of theatre in which diverse alogical elements, including non-matrixed performing, are organised in a compartmented structure.” Michael Kirby, *Happenings* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1965) 21. “Matrixed” performance for Kirby refers to most traditional forms of theatre where characters, narrative, setting etc. are part of an “information structure” (13). “Compartmented for Kirby implies “the arrangement and contiguity of theatrical units that are completely self-contained and hermetic” (13). In the case of *Sir Don* therefore, we are dealing with both matrixed and non-matrixed elements, but *Sir Don* does exhibit ‘compartmented structure in the form of the prepared journalists’ questions which were rehearsed but asked in random order.

TheatreWorks' self-styled 'location plays' of the 1980s were early, local versions of 'site-specific theatre' – narrative dramas that took place in trams, boats, pubs, houses, shopping centres, parks and gardens. Their immediate and popular success led to a breakout of 'location theatre' in Melbourne throughout the 1980s and their influence can still be seen today.² Unlike comparable, contemporary productions overseas which, according to Miwon Kwon, Nick Kaye and others trace their genealogy back through minimalism in the plastic arts,³ TheatreWorks' location oeuvre came about as a result of specific, local influences, including the practices of independent filmmakers and the strategies of Victoria's community theatre movement to place themselves in the regions and suburbs in order to reach out and find new audiences for theatre. Another influence was the prior participation of TheatreWorks members in Happenings and street theatre performances in the 1970s

To inform this research and demonstrate the complex interconnectivity of invented and found spaces that take place in a typical location play for the purposes of this research, I helped reconstitute a contemporary example: *Sir Don v. The Ratpack*. This was a largely improvised piece of 'agit-prop' mounted by Mullumbimby's Gorilla Street Theatre (GST) outside the Brisbane Convention Centre during BHP Billiton's Annual General Meeting on the 26th of November, 2009.⁴ This performance had elements of both the traditional 'Happening' and the classic site-specific production.

Created out of the mines in remote Broken Hill, and now owned by shareholders across the globe, what used to be called "The Big Australian" – BHP Billiton – is currently the largest mining conglomerate in the world. Aware of a forthcoming "International Convergence" planned for the corporation's 2009 AGM, documentary filmmaker David Bradbury, along with a number of people active in the environmental movement, were keen to promote their concerns about the consequences of BHP's imminent, massive expansion of uranium mining at Roxby Downs. This cohort came together around Mullumbimby's GST troupe with the intention of mounting a 'mock AGM' outside the Brisbane Convention Centre, using an actor to play the retiring chair of BHP, ('Sir') Don Argus. Here

² Glen Elston's productions of *Wind In the Willows* and various forest-located plays of Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*) have enjoyed a continuous run in Melbourne's Botanical Gardens since the 1980s.

³ Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another, Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004) and Nick Kaye, ed., *Site Specific Art* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁴ An 8 minute video record is viewable online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDD1q_sjor0 . Viewed 23 February 2012.

was an opportunity to explore how performance space can be produced in the Lefebvrian sense,⁵ and then deployed like a Foucauldian heterotopia⁶ to interact creatively with the various other social spaces that surround it. This, I argue, is key to reading the appeal and flexibility of place-based performance.

The public space available outside Brisbane's Convention Centre discloses a wide, fan shaped stair case leading up to the entrance. It suggested the layout of a neo-classical Greek amphitheatre and to exploit this historically charged cultural geography I calculated that rather than stage a static board meeting, a more mobile performance piece could start in what would be the 'orchestra' (here the footpath), and flow up through the 'audience space' (the steps) towards the wide glass entrance to the building. The trajectory of such a performance therefore would subvert the normal configuration of the classic model by taking the action from the stage *into* the arena of its reception – a tactic for breaching the fourth wall that some TheatreWorks location plays had also applied.⁷

Drawing on the TheatreWorks experiences it seemed to me that mobility was the key to any successful alternative performance outside BHP's AGM. In an echo of Lefebvre's point about space being produced by the energy deployed within Michel de Certeau describes how "the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers".⁸

One way to achieve mobility at the planned International Convergence was, I argued, to constitute a mock door-stop press conference outside the AGM, using 'journalists' instead of 'investor/protesters' at a static board meeting. This would allow the GST troupe to raise the relevant issues (as journalists) and to move all over the steps in any direction dictated by the central interviewee: the actor (Mike Russo) playing 'Sir Don.' After all, mobility as a common element of site-specific performance derives, among other things, from the earlier street theatre need to

⁵ As outlined in Henri Lefebvre's *La Production De L'espace*. Trans. Nicholson-Smith, Donald. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) where Lefebvre describes how all human space can be linked to Fred Hoyle's physical theory of space "as the product of energy" 13.

⁶ The general theory of heterotopia is outlined in his lecture reprinted as Michel Foucault 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16 Spring (1986).

⁷ Most notably Peter Sommerfeld's *Dee Jay View* (1984) staged in a former cinema where the dramatic action took place in the raked auditorium, while the audience were seated where the screen would normally be.

⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Rendall, S. (London, University of California Press, 1988) 117.

keep pace with a larger (moving) demonstration, and to minimise arrest, essentially – to move on, but keep performing.

The convention of the door-stop press conference is essentially an improvised (non-matrixed) contest between a random assemblage of paparazzi with their various notebooks and digital recorders on the one hand, and the person they're seeking answers from on the other – the latter sometimes flanked by minders, security, police, lawyers etc. The heterotopia of this performance circle, the social space of a media discourse, is 'created' in the Lefebvrian sense, largely by the act of journalists pointing cameras, questions and other recording devices in the direction of the interviewee, invariably a celebrity, politician, or person of current public interest. Sometimes these 'targets' attempt to hide their identity and avoid the press, in other cases they are happy to promote their own take on events and bask as it were, in the limelight of media attention. Like Lefebvre and de Certeau, Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks agree that "events create spaces"⁹ In this case, the 'democratic circle' is something they observe forming around a public fight. This circle is key to understanding the mechanics of any space of contest, with the proviso that, in the mobile press conference scenario, there is generally a single combatant on one side (answering/avoiding questions) and any number of media players (opponents) on the other, throwing the questions out. The live 'audience' for this 'fight' is, in a very direct sense, also deeply implicated as one of the combatants (setting aside the intended audience witnessing these events via the subsequent media and print broadcasts). In most examples of this familiar engagement, the assumption is that the journalists are seeking the truth (or some further complication of the public narrative, a denial, exposure, or trip-up etc.); while the targeted subject aims to subvert the truth or at best avoid making an embarrassing public mistake. Whether this is correct or not, the basic combative nature of the press conference trope gives it its dramatic potential. This allowed the GST troupe to shape a piece street theatre around the kinds of questions people wanted to ask BHP Billiton's chief executive, and thereby draw attention, on a public stage as it were, to the environmental consequences normally glossed over by both the company, and an often compliant or disinterested media.¹⁰

Over a number of rehearsals the environmental impact of BHP's activities world-wide was analyzed and potential questions workshopped as the beginning of a 'text' (matrix) for the performance. This involved researching the mining industry generally, and uranium extraction in particular, so that eventually the issues to be

⁹ Mike Pearson, Michael Shanks. *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001) 21.

¹⁰ As Queensland's disgraced former premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Peterson famously boasted, attending a press conference for him was like "feeding the chooks," a not-so-covert reference perhaps to its acknowledged disinformative function.

dealt with could be organized thematically under headings like: ‘Toxic Dust’, ‘Yellowcake,’ ‘Water Pollution,’ ‘Global Warming,’ ‘Legal Issues,’ ‘Effects on Indigenous Populations,’ ‘Industrial Relations,’ ‘Health and Safety,’ ‘Nuclear Proliferation,’ etc.¹¹

It was resolved that each ‘journalist’ would take a set of questions relating to one of these themes and fire them at the hapless ‘Sir Don’ in random order, much like real journalists would do in the circumstances (since most journalists and their media organizations often have not-so-hidden agendas anyway). Thus, as a rudimentary ‘script’ developed, characters within the Ratpack were designated as the ‘Personal journo’ (Don Argus, the real chair of BHP, was about to retire), the ‘Yellowcake journo,’ the ‘Legal journo,’ the ‘Water journo,’ ‘Indigenous Affairs journo,’ and so on. Meanwhile Sir Don, in the time honoured tradition of such events, would give a set of standardized, fairly meaningless, bland and ineffectual replies – literally dodging questions as he worked his way up towards the entrance to the Convention Centre (while maintaining the illusion that he was in fact the chairman of this vast multi-national en route to its AGM). Such a tactic allowed Mike Russo and Scott Davis (playing Sir Don and his minder) to lead the Ratpack virtually all over the steps, up or down, as the impromptu ‘press conference’ went where ever it felt like. In this way, Mullumbimby’s GST plotted to get its message across to any interested shareholders arriving for the meeting and perhaps even to draw in the ‘legitimate’ media, and hence score points in the even greater contest for media ‘space’ on the evening news.

Applying Lefebvre’s contention that social space can be generated by the energy deployed within it, the space of the moving press conference is thus ‘vectored’ into being by the focus that multiple cameras and other recorders have when they are all pointed towards the same person. Another way of expressing this is to say that energy itself originates with the interaction of polar opposites (points of alternate ordering). To return again to the metaphor of Physics, electricity for example, is created by an interchange between positive and negative terminals (direct current) or spinning magnets (alternating current). The polar opposites involved in a meta/physical confrontation, such as GST’s ‘press conference,’ are the combatants themselves. In the adversarial stance taken, lies the ‘charge’ that is required to ‘detonate’ performative space into being. All fights whether staged or impromptu (matrixed or non-matrixed) are also a kind of performance, with narrative through lines, moments of tension, physical engagement, and sweaty endings. Even common military parlance, language of the ultimate pugilists, speaks of a “*theatre of operations.*”

¹¹ Some of this material included publications such as: Friends of the Earth. BHP Billiton Alternative Annual Report: Undermining the Future (n. pub., 2009).

Pearson and Shanks outline the spatial forces at work here.

As a fight breaks out the crowd parts, steps back, withdraws to give the action space. Instantly they take up the best position for watching, a circle. It's democratic, everyone is equidistant from the centre, no privileged viewpoints. There may be a struggle to see better but the circle can expand to accommodate those who rush to see what's happening. Or it thickens. A proto-playing area is created, with an inside and outside, constantly redefined by the activity of the combatants, who remain three dimensional...The size and ambiance of the space are conditioning factors. Then just as quickly the incident ends, the space is inundated by the crowd and there are no clues what to watch. ¹²

After 15 seconds of opening credits on the YouTube video,¹³ the performance of *Sir Don v. The Ratpack* is inaugurated at the 18 second mark by the 'Personal Journo' with the line "There he is!" pointing towards where Sir Don and his minder are just arriving on foot. As Steward advises "[h]ave an elastic beginning for your script, allowing time for a crowd to gather". ¹⁴Clearly, the GST budget did not stretch to the provision of a limo for Sir Don's arrival and anything less would have undermined the all important element of *authenticity*. Consequently, this opening line was designed to draw attention to Sir Don's arrival on foot and act as the trigger point for other 'Journos' who at this point just happened to be milling around nearby in small, discrete groups. This allowed the GST actors to remain initially distinct and separate from the larger demonstration which was kept well behind police lines in the background. If GST's performance of *Sir Don* had originated from within this larger, real demonstration kept at some distance by the police it is doubtful that it would ever have made it even to the intended starting point at the bottom of the steps. In this sense, the heterotopia of the performance was able to carve out its own spatial niche separate from the other, larger events taking place (the heterotopias of the real demonstration and that of the AGM).

The effect of the opening line delivered by the 'Personal Journo' was to identify the character playing 'Sir Don' and thereby draw the rest of GST's Ratpack into

¹² Theatre/Archaeology 21

¹³ This opening sequence was not generated by GST directly. Instead it includes footage of the evacuation of a nearby office building – part of a fire-drill – that just happened to occur immediately after the live performance of *Sir Don* a few blocks away.

¹⁴ Dwight. Steward, *Stage Left* (Dover, Delaware: The Tanager Press, 1970) 21

play as the constructed space of the press conference starts to gather shape out of the ‘energy’ of the oppositional performances brought into being on the footpath. Within a few more seconds the first questions about Sir Don’s imminent retirement are fired by the ‘Personal Journo’ and the video cuts to a high shot looking down (22 second mark).



Figure 1.

Members of GST’s ‘Ratpack’ confront ‘Sir Don’ upon his arrival.

A giant white elephant of the ‘real’ demonstration can be seen in the background (top right).¹⁵

Figure 1 shows the ‘Ratpack’ initially forming as a circle around the be-suited Sir Don and the minder to his immediate left: the ‘Ghost of Peter Garrett.’¹⁶ This uncanny player was also a archetypal accompaniment to the cult of celebrity: the private ‘body’ guard/personal minder. Everybody present seemed to understand and accept ‘Peter Garrett’s’ role immediately, including the police and other security personnel, none of whom questioned the legitimacy of this character’s silent but intimidating presence – a composite of his sunglasses, mysterious briefcase and small earphone – apparently connecting him to a larger, overarching panoptic space of surveillance. As the ‘press conference’ makes its way up the steps it starts to draw in players outside the GST troupe, including BHP officials, glimpsed in a somewhat flummoxed state in the background (and no doubt wondering who this important person is). Indeed, at the 30-40 second mark a man in a light coloured coat, apparently connected to BHP and obviously concerned that one of his VIPs has been unintentionally accosted by the press

¹⁵ Traditional street theatre tactics also employed large, hard-to-ignore puppets to make concise political points.

¹⁶ Peter Garrett was Federal Minister for the Environment at this time and in his previous career as a rock musician had famously produced many political and environmental protest songs of his own.

contingent, seems to be voluntarily attaching himself to ‘Sir Don’s’ security detail.

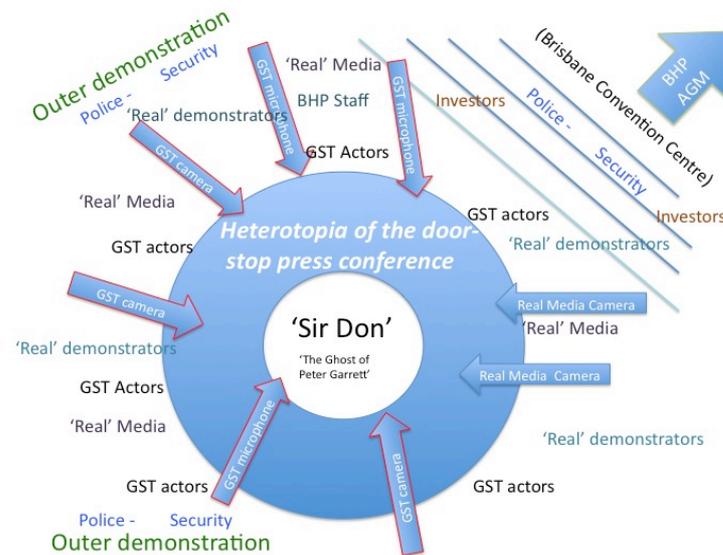


Figure 2..

A Map of the performative geography of *Sir Don v. The Ratpack*

Figure 2 shows how performance space is created in *Sir Don* using cameras and microphones which focus the outer edges of the circle towards the centre. In this way the arena of the press conference, with Sir Don marking its centre point, is given precedence over other spaces (such as the real demonstration nearby, and the AGM inside the Convention Centre). However, the journey of *Sir Don v The Ratpack* as a piece of agit-prop is precisely to move from the realm of the demonstration *into* the alternately ordered space of the AGM, illustrating Foucault’s point about the permeability of heterotopia.¹⁷

At 1 minute 30 seconds into the video record other participants in the demonstration, ‘real demonstrators’, apparently ignorant of the nature of the constructed ‘performance’ occurring, are also drawn into the press conference, including an indigenous activist immediately behind Sir Don. After questions about the water supply for Roxby Downs (1 minute 40 seconds), questionable practices involving the military in West Papua working on behalf of BHP (2 minutes 30 seconds), carbon neutrality (3 minutes), BHP’s toxic legacy (3 minutes 30 seconds) and nuclear proliferation, the subject turns to yellow cake – a refined form of uranium ore. By now the ‘democratic’ circle encasing Sir Don has grown considerably and forms an unbroken loop around him. At the 4 minute mark, Sir Don makes a weak joke about how he “wouldn’t mind some yellow

¹⁷ ‘Of Other Spaces’: 26.

cake with his morning tea” since he’s “feeling a bit peckish” and draws a suitably disgusted response from some of these genuine activists.¹⁸

At the 4 minute 30 second mark, some of these ‘real demonstrators,’ whether aware of the larger pretence or not, start throwing their own questions at the hapless ‘Sir Don’. One asks about environmental destruction and social dislocation. At this point all three social spaces present around the Convention Centre, GST performers, real demonstrators, and attendees at the AGM are now sharing the same frame. The collision of heterotopia is therefore complete.

As this roiling intercalation of separate social spaces with their separate agendas, moves randomly towards the doors of the AGM, like Pearson and Shank’s circle round a fight, the shape of the press pack expands and contracts, elongates into an ellipse then spreads lengthways up the steps as journalists and onlookers jockey for a better view or greater access to questioning – shape shifting but always focused on Sir Don. By the 5 minute 20 second point ‘Sir Don’ (no doubt surprised that he had managed to get this far), calls to his minder and together they step blithely through the police line guarding the front doors into the space of the official AGM. By this stage most of the real demonstrators have peeled off assuming, not unreasonably, that their entrance would be blocked. However, the constructed space of GST’s door stop press conference, having gone through this crucial portal, now superimposes itself (collides) into its oppositional place of ordering: the foyer area of BHP Billiton’s AGM. Although the ranks of the ‘Ratpack’ are now thinning, a determined few maintain their hot pursuit, their private, internal anxieties about getting this far reflected in the nervous question framed by the “Radiation/Health Journo at 5 minutes 40 seconds.

Questions about the health of BHP’s workers continue as the mock press conference hovers under signs welcoming shareholders into the meeting and visually trumpeting the company’s many achievements. Clearly, by this stage, GST’s constructed heterotopia has gone about as far as it can and matters reach a climax as the questions turn to ‘Sir Don’s’ own health. This was the designated trigger question to end the performance. At six minutes 30 seconds, as he tries to answer, Sir Don appears to suffer some kind of breathing difficulty, and asking for water, soon collapses to the ground, causing another layer of confusion (7 minutes) as real doctors (including anti-nuclear activist Dr. Helen Caldicott – also an investor/protestor) start discussing the need to call an ambulance (Figure 3).

¹⁸ Indeed, as soon as the circle of the press conference began forming on the footpath there were loud boos and hisses directed at ‘Sir Don’ *and* GST’s Ratpack. Clearly, from the point of view of the ‘real demonstration’ both Media pack and Company representatives were perceived to embody two halves of the same problem.



Figure 3.

Sir Don ‘collapses’ inside the space of the AGM and is attended by doctor-shareholders

By now the heterotopia of the mock press conference as superimposed itself on the space of the AGM and at this point the Happening comes to an oddly anti-climactic denouement as Sir Don, (doubtless sensing the problems that could flow from a real ambulance being summoned), soon miraculously recovers, gets to his feet, and calmly walks back out of the building through its glass doors. Again, as Pearson and Shanks predict, the spectatorship gathered around a fight can just as effortlessly fade away – as happens here. “The incident ends, the space is inundated by the crowd and there are no clues what to watch”.¹⁹ Clearly the performative space created by the Happening can evaporate just as readily as it is formed.

In truth, nobody in Mullumbimby’s GST imagined the ruse would work so convincingly that Sir Don and the combined Ratpack would be able to simply walk past a vigilant police line and enter the foyer of the building where the audience for the AGM was already gathering. This other audience, now drawn into GST’s invasion of their space, consisted of a constellation of small investor/shareholders, fund managers, corporate staff, police and security personnel. There was clearly risk involved at this point in the form of bringing in real emergency services. As TheatreWorks location plays also demonstrate, problematic issues are always present when fictional elements are inserted into real locations and distinct social situations. Fortunately, the performance of *Sir Don* ended before anything untoward happened, or real emergency services became involved. But that concern was there. In this case, Dwight Steward’s

¹⁹ *Theatre/Archaeology* 21.

warning about having a definitive conclusion to one's street theatre performance clearly applies.²⁰ The collision of created spaces (mock press conference into AGM) becomes fraught as a result of the intervention of real people (doctors in fact) confronting from their point of view, a real (medical) problem.

Having previously only glimpsed this problem of a conclusion, I recall suggesting that Sir Don should have a penultimate light-bulb moment when the torrent of questions about the palpable damage done by his company would see him undergo a 'road-to-Damascus' moment and admit to the error of his ways, precipitating some kind of personal crisis. And although Sir Don's collapse *was* taken seriously at the time by those present who were not party to the pretence, this sort of narrative conclusion seemed rather 'in-authentic' and fairly unlikely, given both the character involved and in the context (and it was). And so GST's management of the space of its mock press conference worked to expectations in terms of the questioning and the drawing in of other demonstrators, investors, staff and security, but it failed Steward's important test of providing a convincing or satisfactory exit from the scene.

Applying a new critical toolkit.

This raises the question of how *Sir Don v. The Ratpack* measures up in terms of the main set of assessment items proposed for site-specific theatre in my doctoral thesis *Really Moving Drama*.

Authenticity. That the performance had an aura of authenticity is reinforced by the ease with which onlookers and other players were so readily drawn in to the ruse. A door stop press conference involving some important person is entirely to be expected around the fringes of events like the Annual General Meeting of a major corporation. All the props, cameras and recorders, were genuine and mostly working.

Site Generic or Site Specific. Although the action was planned for this specific convergence of forces and personalities and was designed with BHP Billiton in mind, it is possible that a similar piece of street theatre could take place outside, or on the fringes of, equivalent corporate or political gatherings. The form of the press conference could similarly be used to illustrate partisan points in an ongoing discourse.

Appropriate in Other Settings? It follows from item ii that staging a mock press conference would be appropriate in any setting where media are expected to gather.

²⁰ Stage Left 24.

Mobility. Above all this was perhaps the key element in the conception and execution of *Sir Don*. The constant moving about of journalists and subject, the hankering, restless, nervous deployment of cameras and microphones, the urgency of the questions (time is money), all mimicked what happens in a real door stop press conference. These temporary media events are *expected* to move. This adds to the performance a measure of danger and unpredictability.

Relations between performers, audience, and outside world. As can be seen from the video record the relations between the GST performers and their target audience – the real media and the BHP investors attending the AGM, was fluid and intermixed. As the event proceeds all these parties become involved. In the wake of the performance a number of national television articles referring to it appeared in at least two newspapers.²¹ To this extent some elements of the intended story were promulgated to a much wider audience than those present around the Convention Centre.

Proximate or Ubiquitous? In the course of *Sir Don*, emotions run high in a quite tight circle that forms around the main character and his minder. Although, in the tradition of the door stop, *Sir Don* and the ghost of Peter Garrett are given due deference and kept in the centre of the action. This engagement then became ubiquitous as it spread in a wide trajectory up and around the steps of the Convention Centre towards the entrance.

Active or Passive Audience Role. Some onlookers remained passive (one suspects they were investors or neutral by-standers), others, obviously more politically committed, became quite active as they began to throw in their own questions. As we saw in some cases they also became quite upset with *Sir Don*'s flippant responses.

Transgression and Complicity. The performance clearly transgressed a police line designed to protect the larger board meeting from any attempt at disruption. In this sense the mock press conference and its various hangers-on, became complicit in a strategy to occupy space they were officially prohibited from.

²¹ (Tony Grant-Taylor, 'BHP Predicts Strong Demand for Coal Sales', *Courier Mail* (27 November 2009): 78 and the author, "BHP Billiton Hit by Gorilla attack', *The Byron Shire Echo* (1 December 2009): 17

Permeability of Spaces. As the action proceeds the space of the real demonstration blends into the space of the mock conference, which in turn moves into the foyer of the Convention Centre and mingles with the periphery of the AGM. The problem identified above in relation to ending the performance occurs inside the Convention Centre's foyer where the invented space of the door stop effectively fizzles out for lack of narrative content (i.e. contest/questions).

Other Senses. No other senses were involved apart from sight and hearing although a certain amount of jostling and jockeying for position (haptic) space was involved in the constitution of the media ring, with various 'journalists' cramming together for optimal viewing and interrogating space.

Real Time Setting. Consistent with most site-specific productions, the action unfolded in real time and lasted for approximately 15 to 20 minutes in total. The video record is therefore an edited version containing about half the total exchange that took place. This length surprised the GST participants since in most rehearsals, the improvised questioning on various rehearsal staircases rarely ran to more than 5 minutes.

With the exception of the unresolved, potentially risky and odd ending, *Sir Don v The Ratpack*, satisfies most of the criteria required for a reasonably successful site-specific Happening. Its usefulness as a example of street theatre was recognized by at least the editors of the *Byron Shire Echo*.²² It also succeeded in getting its anti-nuclear message across into at least a few of the mainstream media outlets present.

In summary, the 'heterotopia' of a performance space, can be created merely through the focused energy of a performance. The challenge lies in managing that space once it has been 'produced'. This brings into play the relationship between such a space and all the spaces, imagined or real, that surround it. The permeability of these various other spaces ensures that collisions and exchanges (of energy, people, narratives) is almost certain to take place. This gives site-specific performance both its special potential and its most serious limitation: the possibility that the underlying deception can be problematic. Controlling risk through the intercalations and superimpositions that occur when a play is produced on location is perhaps the most important criteria for spatial management. And if public liability requirements are to demarcate an official

²² In the edition following the International Convergence, *Sir Don* is described in GST's hometown local paper as "one of the most effective and entertaining forms of protest" *The Byron Shire Echo* (1 December 2009): 68.

limit to some forms of site-specific practice, then management of risk becomes even more crucial.

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