

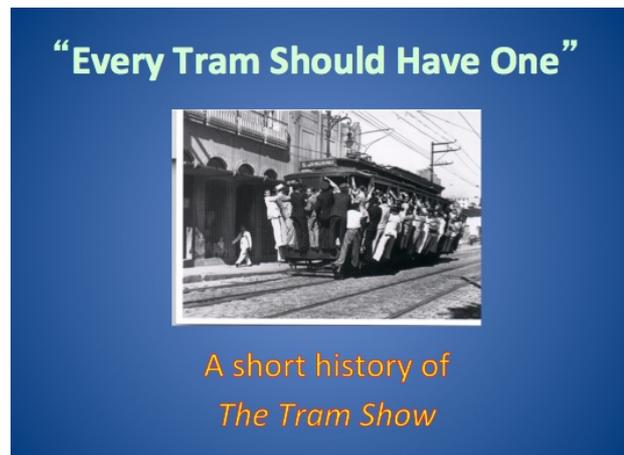
“A SHORT HISTORY OF THE TRAM SHOW”

(Conference Paper)

The International Federation of Theatre Research

Ludwig Maximilians Universitat, Munich Germany

June 2010



Thanks for the opportunity to talk at the IFTR conference in Munich.

And for chance to articulate out loud some issues I've been trying to wrangle on paper for about a year now, and in my mind for last 28 years:

What made the tram show so immediately Popular ?

What was the key to its success?

not just in/of itself

but in giving licence to, unleashing a decade long obsession with site-specific perf in Melb in 1980s

-

And therefore what lessons does TS hold for theatre practice going fwd...

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An original season timed to coincide with Moomba booked out.

1st season ran for **several months** in 1982

Reproduced five more times s over the next dozen years

(roughly **400 performances**),

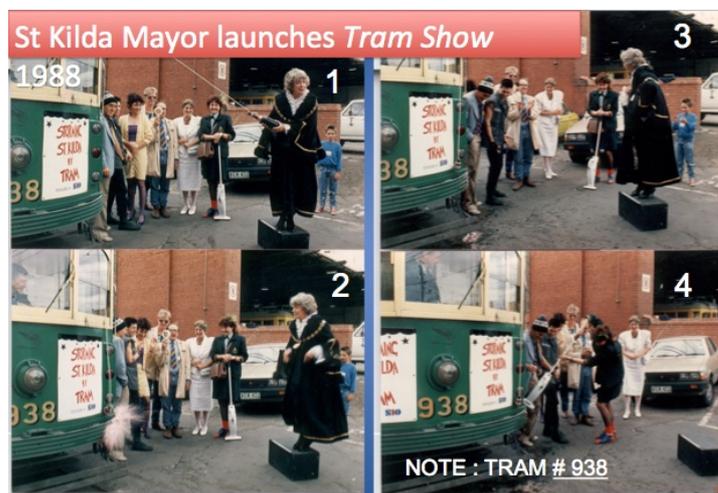
Total audience of some **15,000 paying** customers

(if more than 50 per trip could have been included in the audience TW would have made a fortune

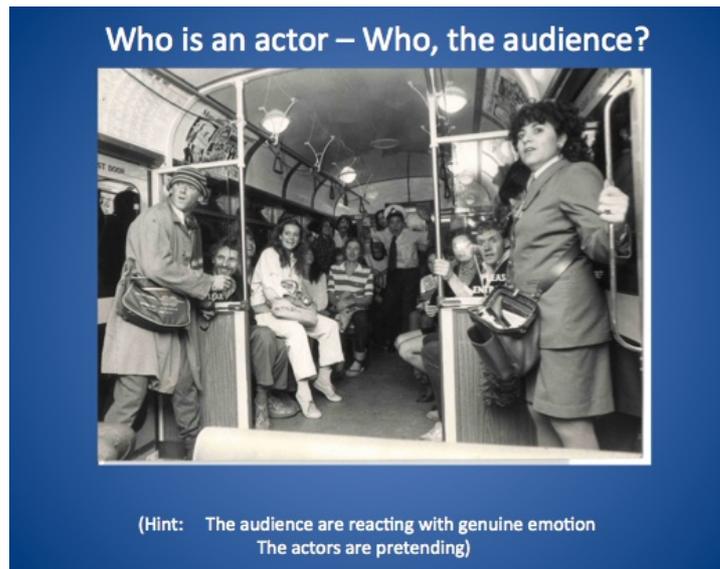
So the key to its success (small immersive audience) is also its limitation.



What started as *Storming Mont Albert By Tram* in 1982 revised to become *Storming St.Kilda By Tram* in 1988 and 1991, then *Storming Melbourne By Tram* in 1992 and finally *Storming Glenelg By Tram* in 1992 and 1994 - since Adelaide was the only other Australian city with a functioning tram system



The Idea caught on and Melbourne soon saw plays on boats, in gardens, pubs, grand mansions, private houses, boarding houses, gaols etc



In all these site specific plays there is a simple answer as to why they worked:

The Appeal arises from 2 deliberate confusions:

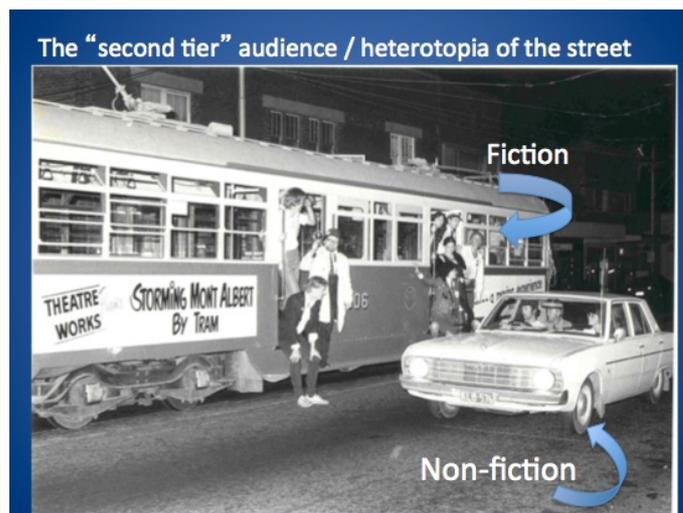
Normal barriers between, ACTORS /AUDIENCE are blurred

Rigid demarcation of Theatre/Stage space collapses.

TRAM = Theatre, Stage, *and* Auditorium

Then there's a third element:

The heterotopia of the street



The intercalation with another layer of spectatorship outside the show...

All of which amounts to a new kind of immersive experience in the theatre, in which you, as an audience member, are also part of the show. Which happens in amongst and all around you...

Its all about relationships, the relation of spaces, and people

I am mindful here of Lefebvre's warning about the "hypercomplexity" of social space and that the "*places* of social space are very different from those of natural space in that they are not simply juxtaposed: they may be intercalated, combined, superimposed – they may even sometimes *collide*" (1991: 88 emphasis added).

One way of understanding this is to look at the collision of spaces that occurred on Tram Show's opening night.

At around 9.20 pm on the 26th of February 1982, in Victoria Parade, Collingwood, two buses heading north towards Fitzroy deliberately blocked the tracks of a tram heading east to Mont Albert.

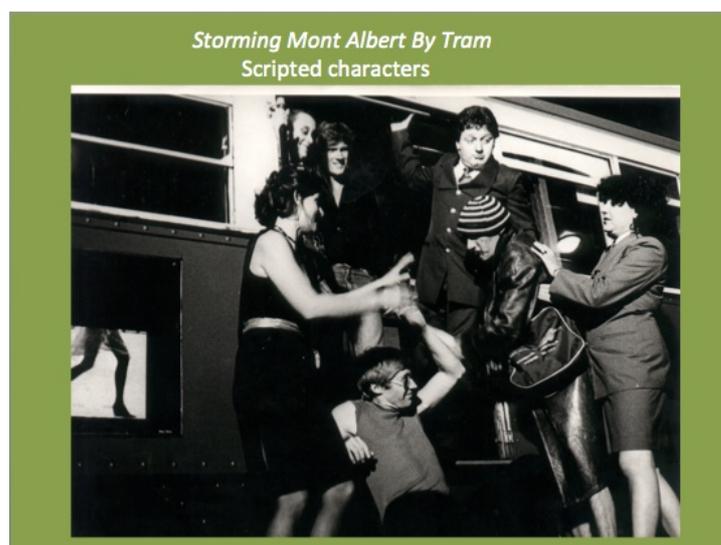
The buses were part of this production:



The peripatetic wanderings of Quantock's bus show varied in its itinerary from night to night. It started with dinner and singing rehearsals at the Comedy Café then



he and colleague Geoff Brooks (dressed in Salvation Army uniform and holding the koala) took their accomplices (the audience), appropriately “masked” and thereby sharing a collective identity, to restaurants and family planning clinics, clubs, discos, fun fairs, the College of Surgeons (Rod had a joke about them “but it got cut out”), and once even to Russell Street police headquarters - where the group sang pre-rehearsed songs and caused mutual embarrassment all round (See Figure 1). In the case of the ‘raid’ on police headquarters the reception was described as “decidedly chilly” (Landray 1982:2).



In contrast the narrative events of *The Tram Show* were largely contained within the vehicle itself as it trundled along its predetermined course and involved these

characters above. Naturally, the action also flowed with certain characters as they left the tram and headed off into the streets outside. But essentially it was a scripted play, whereas the bus show was improvised. Nevertheless they used the spatial potential of their productions in similar ways.

The collision of these two shows on opening night was recorded by Suzanne Spunner in the *National Times* a week later where she noted that as a result of this near accident “(p)assengers in all vehicles were stunned but sustained no injuries except for a debilitating contortion of the facial muscles.” She identified the “ancestry” of what took place in the “happenings and events of the late 1960s”, and went on to note that here “the usual division between audience and performance is challenged, which gives rise to ambiguities that are confronting and often hilariously funny” (1982: 24).

So I’m proposing in this paper that much of the appeal of TheatreWorks’ site-specific productions lay in disturbing this ‘usual division’. By re-negotiating the contract with its audiences the company set in train a new kind of actor/spectator (and a theatre/space) relationship that only becomes fully possible when plays are produced in real locations.

Plot Summary (Narrative Space)

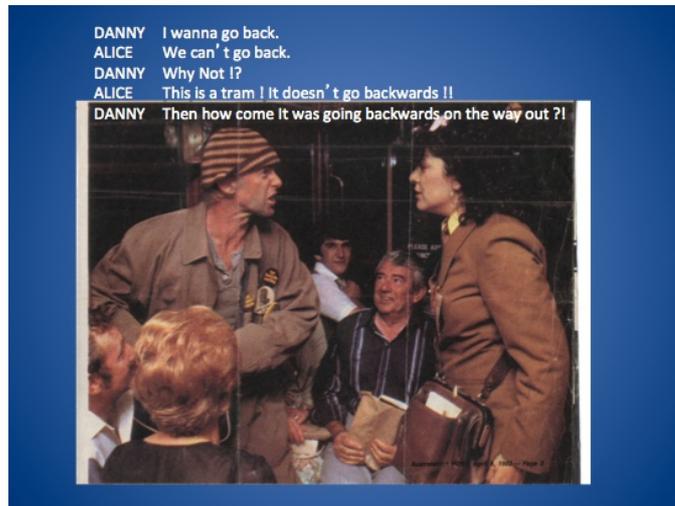
What is the heterotopia the diegetic space of the TRAM SHOW

Like *The Bus Show*, and despite the obvious structural difference of improvised vs scripted, the events in *Storming Mont Albert by Tram* largely revolve around one character, the novice conductress Alice Katranski.

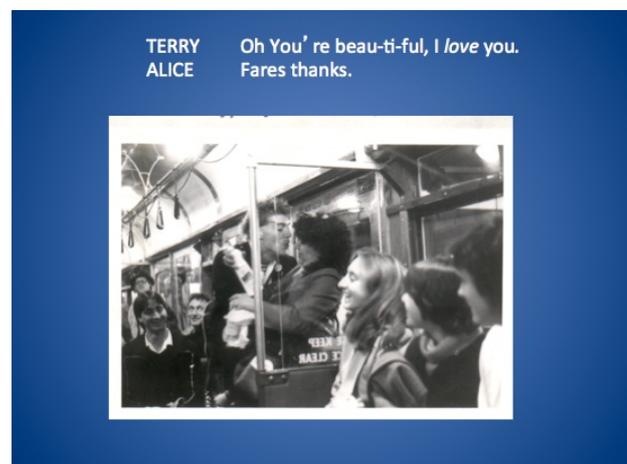


Brimming with good will, but anxiously facing her first real night on the job, Alice’s desire to see things run smoothly, to be personable and charming to all

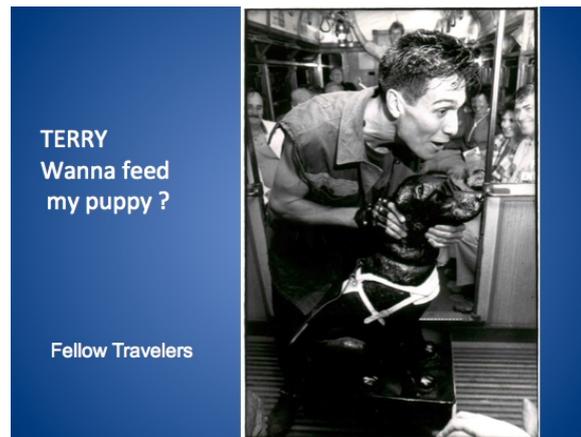
her customers all the time, is constantly undermined by circumstances beyond her control.



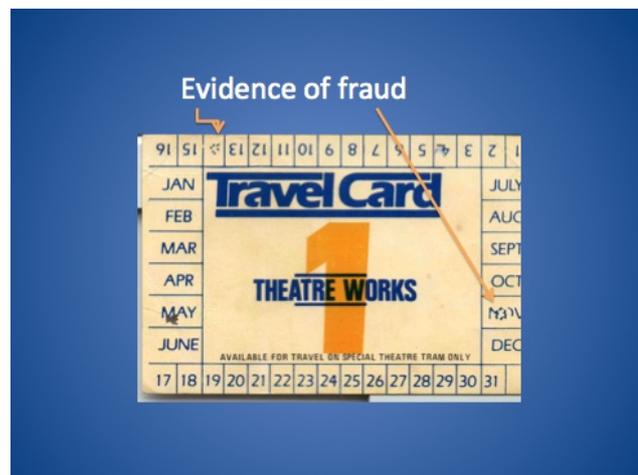
These are largely set in train by Daniel O'Rourke, an inebriated former politics lecturer from Monash University.



Another problem for her is Terry Meagher, a larrikin punkster who scrambles on board carrying a large plastic dog normally used for collecting money for the Blind Society.

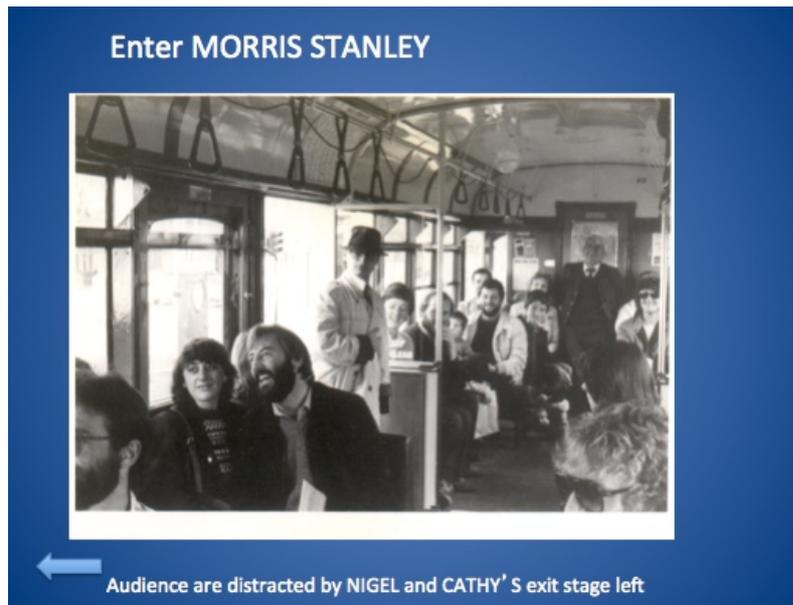


The images are jumping around a bit this is the St. Kilda Terry, the previous was one was the Mont Albert Terry. – Jeremy Stanford- who you see here also the direct connection between performer /spectator. Not that we picked on people as such. They could react or not. It was entirely up to them.

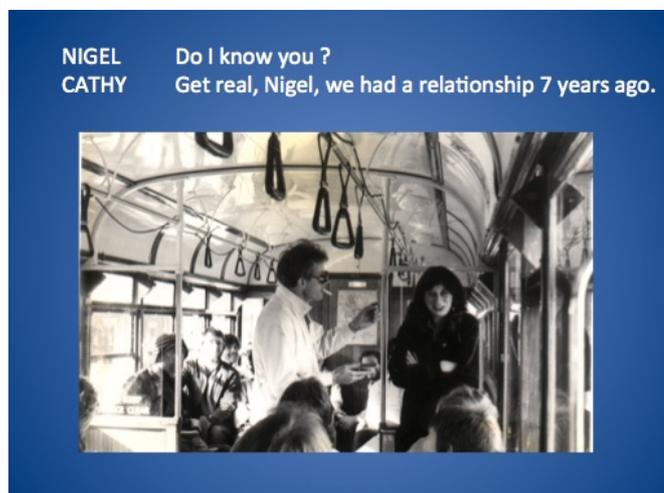


Except that Morris, the ticket inspector, used the theatre/tram ticket to accuse people (random audience members) of tampering with their tickets. Everyone had the same ticket and therefore everyone was guilty. MMTB issued fraud alert when they saw we had copied a real ticket. Until it was pointed out it was obviously four times larger and had the programme on the back.

So that even at level of the props there's a certain collision of fiction and reality going on...



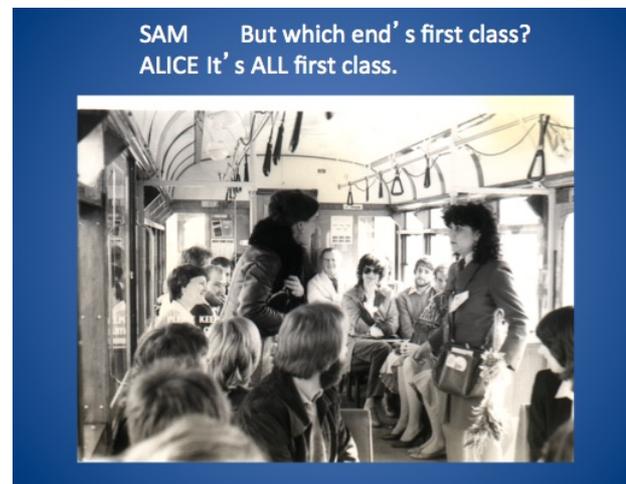
This is Morris entering the tram (in disguise). He's a hybrid of Basil Fawlty and Inspector Clouseau, his chief prop an enormous magnifying glass used to get guilty ticket tamperers. He also gives Alice a hard time, and when he discovers Terry hasn't been sold a ticket he sacks Alice on the spot. Much to the verbal disapproval of the passengers. Devastated Alice stays on for the ride home but Morris gets his come-uppance and Alice gets her job back. (gotta have a happy ending.



Into this mix are thrown Cathy Waterman, an "escort girl", and Nigel Davidson a pretentious Sydney film maker who, by sheer coincidence, happens to have had a rocky relationship with Cathy some years earlier.

Matters are further complicated by the arrival of a Balwyn housewife, running late for a production at the Melbourne Theatre Company and herself in the

throes of a marital breakdown. Samantha Hart-Byrne's nervous apprehensions are exacerbated by the fact that she's never actually had to use public transport before, but having been evicted from the family Mercedes by an irate husband, she arrives on Alice's tram, totally out of her element and looking for the "first class" seats.



We built in a certain clash of social status into the character mix. Theory being that Melb trams were melting pots. Menzies used to catch # 42 to Kew from office in town. But also class conflict – all conflict is good for drama. The script workshops were built around the characters through improvisation. We designed the conflict into the character mix.

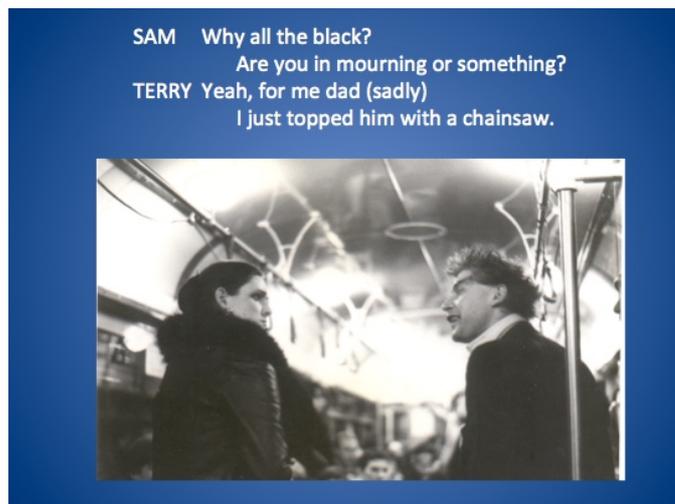
The stories of these various commuters unfold and coalesce as they arrive, interact and leave the tram, sometimes involuntarily.



For example, when Danny tries to pay for his fare with an obsolete pound note Terry summarily evicts him- trying to help Alice. Of course she's appalled. Danny gets left behind but comes roaring back for vengeance on return journey- about where he got chunked off. So when that happens there's a resonance for the audience that directly connects the space of the play with the geography its passing through.

Witness the amazed audience reactions here.

Relationships form and fall apart, fares are evaded, confrontations erupt



All part of the commedia del arte style.

Even a threatened hijacking takes place using a retractable plastic knife which is only partly resolved by the arrival of the 'police'. Who soon discover drugs in Nigel's briefcase.

NIGEL I only said I' d *like* to kill her.



In the confusion that follows the wrong people are arrested, a reconciliation of sorts takes place between Cathy and Nigel (even as he's carted off to gaol facing a potential drug conviction), while Alice and Terry begin what appears to be an unlikely but possibly enduring and mutually beneficial relationship.

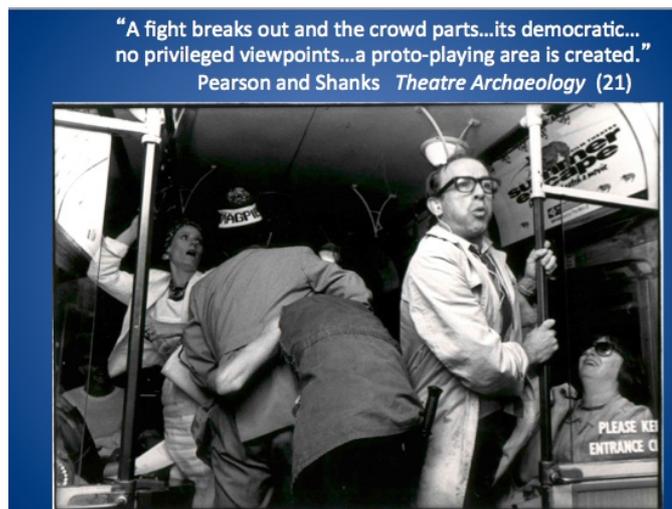
Final duet



Or have these two always been an item? And has the whole interaction between them therefore been a playful pretence, a ploy to have some fun with a bunch of strangers on a tram? As Alice and Terry, after a final song together, walk off hand in hand into the night, it all remains somewhat ambiguous...

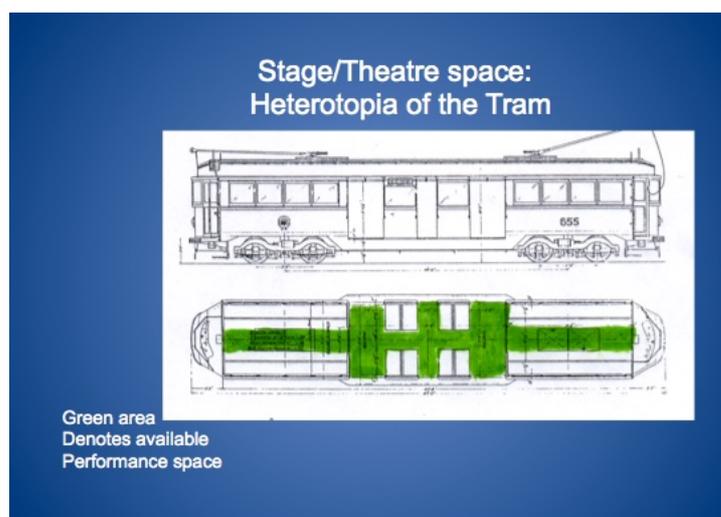
Site-Specific Theatre (Performance Space)

Michael Shanks and Mike Pearson in *Theatre/Archaeology* in talking about the democracy of the circle that forms when a fight breaks out in public, argue that “events create spaces”. This occurs when Danny returns on board during the trip home a fight breaks out:



Events create spaces. 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...A proto-playing area is created, with an inside and an outside, constantly redefined by the activity of the combatants, who remain three dimensional (21).

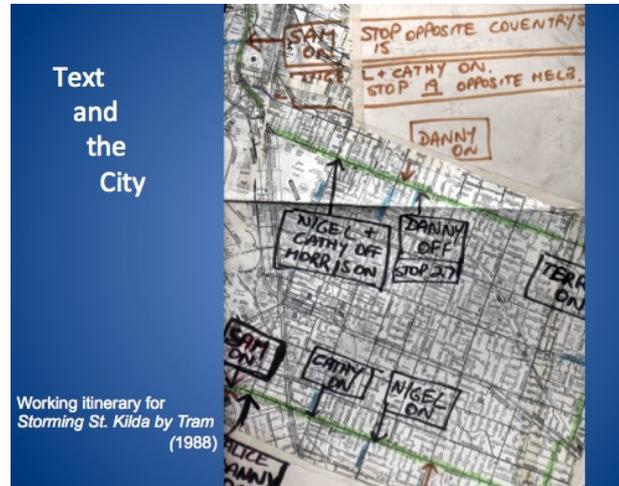
A circularity of spectatorship was built in to the 'stage space' of the Tram Show by virtue of the layout of the vehicle



For the Mont Albert and St. Kilda seasons TheatreWorks was able to secure a unique version of the W class model (the No 938, sometimes the 983) where all the seats at both ends of these trams faced the centre. Some were seats recycled

from an old bus that had been fitted during the shortages and austerity measures dictated by the Second World War.

Because there's not a lot of space left after the passengers are seated the Action happened in the aisles and around the doorways



But the space of the narrative related to the space of the street in other more direct ways.

Because of its reliance on entrances and exits to further the narrative, *Storming Mont Albert By Tram* was also critically dependent on an itinerary linked to the streetscape through which it moved. Scenes were structured around and determined by the arrival and departure of characters.

MMTB

Timetable

for

Tram #938

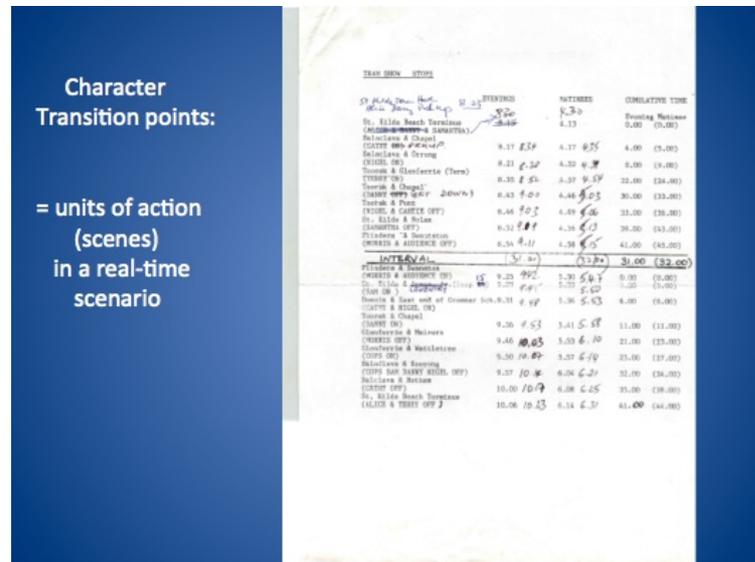
Stops	St. Kilda Beach	Mauldin Depot
St. Kilda Beach	7:50	8:10
Balmain Junction	8:07	8:13
Victoria Rd	8:18	8:24
Malvern	8:26	8:32
Thomas Rd	8:34	8:40
Chapel St	8:42	8:48
St. Kilda Beach	8:50	8:56
Mauldin Depot	9:00	9:06
Victoria Rd	9:19	9:25
Thomas Rd	9:21	9:27
Malvern	9:23	9:29
St. Kilda Beach	9:25	9:31
Balmain Junction	9:27	9:33
Victoria Rd	9:29	9:35
Malvern	9:31	9:37
Thomas Rd	9:33	9:39
Chapel St	9:35	9:41
St. Kilda Beach	9:37	9:43
Mauldin Depot	9:39	9:45
Victoria Rd	9:41	9:47
Thomas Rd	9:43	9:49
Malvern	9:45	9:51
St. Kilda Beach	9:47	9:53
Balmain Junction	9:49	9:55
Victoria Rd	9:51	9:57
Malvern	9:53	9:59
Thomas Rd	9:55	10:01
Chapel St	9:57	10:03
St. Kilda Beach	9:59	10:05
Mauldin Depot	10:01	10:07
Victoria Rd	10:03	10:09
Thomas Rd	10:05	10:11
Malvern	10:07	10:13
St. Kilda Beach	10:09	10:15
Mauldin Depot	10:11	10:17

This inter-dependence of space and text also meant that during the opening night encounter described by Spinner, *The Bus Show*, in blocking *The Tram Show*'s

progress, caused the latter's unfolding narrative to come to a complete halt. In effect, the story of *Storming Mont Albert By Tram* was unable to continue until the vehicle itself did. To this extent the text was totally dependent on the tram's predictable movement through the streets of the city.

**Character
Transition points:**

= units of action
(scenes)
in a real-time
scenario



TRAM LINE	STOPS	STATION	ARRIVAL	DEPARTURE	CUMULATIVE TIME
100	MELBOURNE	Dr. Eddie Beach Terminus	8:30	8:30	0:00 (0:00)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:31	8:31	0:01 (0:01)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:32	8:32	0:02 (0:02)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:33	8:33	0:03 (0:03)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:34	8:34	0:04 (0:04)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:35	8:35	0:05 (0:05)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:36	8:36	0:06 (0:06)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:37	8:37	0:07 (0:07)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:38	8:38	0:08 (0:08)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:39	8:39	0:09 (0:09)
101	MELBOURNE	Dr. Eddie Beach Terminus	8:40	8:40	0:00 (0:00)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:41	8:41	0:01 (0:01)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:42	8:42	0:02 (0:02)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:43	8:43	0:03 (0:03)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:44	8:44	0:04 (0:04)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:45	8:45	0:05 (0:05)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:46	8:46	0:06 (0:06)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:47	8:47	0:07 (0:07)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:48	8:48	0:08 (0:08)
		Belconnen & Chapel	8:49	8:49	0:09 (0:09)

The text intercalated with the streetscape in other, more explicit ways. Towards the end of Act 1 (Outward Journey), Samantha Hart Byrne finally reaches the Melbourne Theatre Company just as some late comers from the audience she's intending to join are finally going in. At which point Morris Stanley reveals he is in fact the author of *Storming Mont Albert By Tram* and becomes quite angry that she is walking out on 'his' show.

Thus the script was located in the "real" space of the tram but inevitably tied to the streetscape through which it moved - not only in the logistical (temporal) sense as indicated, but also in a socio-political one as well.

For example, the socialite character, Samantha Hart-Byrne, gets on in Balwyn (an upper-middle class suburb) whereas Cathy, the escort girl, catches the tram from her commission flat in a more down market part of town. Either way, the random element of the street also came back *into* the tram in the form of confused members of the public or indeed members of the public authorities who felt they had detected some problem on the tram requiring their intervention.

The search for new performance spaces grew initially from the company's stated aim, as defined in its early mission statements, "to dramatise the stories of the suburb" and create "relevant and vital cultural work pertinent to contemporary

Australian life”, work which “reflects the energies of urban society” (TheatreWorks Archive, “Artistic Policy” folder Box 16. Fryer Library. Brisbane. TS).

The idea was to take drama out of conventional theatre buildings and mount original plays in innovative ways. TheatreWorks set out to locate its area of operations in the social demographic of Melbourne’s Eastern suburbs. The tram, an item of public transport servicing its suburban heartland, seemed a perfect vehicle (literally) with which to meet the company’s stated objectives. And although there has been some debate over whether productions like *Storming Mont Albert By Tram* are ‘legitimate’ examples of the ‘Community Theatre’ model, certainly what TheatreWorks discovered in the implementation of their site-specific works, was the *community of the audience within the play*.

O’Toole accounts for this synchronicity of text and space as “a further layering of metaxis” which he defines as “a tension caused by the gap between the real and the fiction, *and* a recognition of that gap” (emphasis added):

At this point...the ‘tram inspector’ revealed that he was a fringe theatre worker (true), and only working on a tram because he was ‘resting’ (fiction but likely). He then hung out of the tram shouting humorous insults at the Melbourne Theatre Company and its real patrons until the tram had passed the building...This gentle metaxis of real and dramatic contexts was layered further by a Brechtian ambush of the whole convention, bringing the **medium** into the metaxis. Maintaining his ‘officious tram inspector’ persona, this actor simultaneously overlaid it with the real role of the TheatreWorks stage manager explaining the interval procedure for the audience, including prearranged drinks at a city hotel bar. (1992:181)

Figure 2 shows a working master plan of character entrances and exits adapted for the *Storming St. Kilda* season (1988). Since the normal St. Kilda route was not sufficiently long enough, a hybrid tram route was put together for this second season in order to flesh out the forty minutes of travel time required for each Act (Outward and Return Journeys). As the street map in Figure 2 indicates this itinerary detoured the story into a wide eastern arc through the upmarket suburbs of Toorak and Malvern. In this version of the script, Samantha Hart-Byrne boards the tram in St. Kilda, at the beginning of the play, having been dumped en route to the Melbourne Theatre Company from her residence in equally upper class Brighton. Whereas, Cathy Waterman now gets on at the ‘red light’ end of Chapel Street, as befitting her ‘escort girl’ status. Figure 3 offers a wider view of the St. Kilda route used in 1988 and 1991. A note from Ken Kimber (the liason officer from the Melbourne Metropolitan Tramways Board)

indicates that the total distance covered, “depot to depot”, was 41 kilometres- a factor in calculating both script length and the tram hire costs.

Figure 4 shows the working timetable supplied by the Melbourne Metropolitan Tramways Board on which this script plan (for *Storming St. Kilda*) was based- a time map on which to imbricate the spatial (physical) journey. Units of action in the text between character entrances and exits (effectively ‘scenes’ in a real time scenario) were calculated to run for as long as it took the tram to reach the relevant stops - given normal traffic flows. In most cases the text came first, in other cases the text was stretched or elided to facilitate major plot points. It was important for example, that Terry throw Danny off well before Morris gets on, so that the ticket inspector remains ignorant of the chaos that has preceded him, and Terry’s role in it. (All of which, of course, the audience knew about and was already a party to). This document (Figure 4) was then provided to the various tram drivers employed on the show as an ideal chronology for them to follow. In practice, as traffic congestion in the inner city worsened and other unforeseen events interrupted the tram’s progress (such as the opening night encounter with *The Bus Show*, not to mention several interventions by actual police officers), this timetable became increasingly optimistic and was rarely accurate. Figure 5 shows that what began as roughly a two hour production (with interval) soon started much later and grew a lot longer.

The Audience Contract (Spectators and Space)

In an Artistic Policy statement dated December 1983, in which TheatreWorks wrote of its intention to “dramatise the stories of the suburb”, to create plays which “reflect the energies of urban life and build a symbolic vocabulary which serves and sustains people in their search for meaning and identity,” the document went on to argue for a body of work that is

...both celebratory and disturbing. ‘Celebratory’, in that a sense of wonder and curiosity about the everyday functioning of the community is embraced and reflected in all aspects of our work. ‘Disturbing’ in that we do not see our role as passively reflecting the status quo, but as intervening against certain spurious images disseminated in the mass culture, thereby opening up new channels of perception. (And to) *explore the processes which maximize the possibilities of the audience/participants both identifying* (placing themselves in the work) *and evaluating* (looking at the wider implications or broader issues at stake). (TheatreWorks Archive, box #16 “Company Files” folder. Fryer Library. Brisbane. TS. emphasis added)

In a redraft of this policy a year later the sentence, “We aim to engage the audience in more meaningful ways than is normally possible in the conventional theatre,” was added.

In *The Tram Show* the audience were, to all intents and purposes, fellow commuters on a number 42 tram, making its way from Mont Albert to the City and back. They were not pestered by the actors to be part of anything, or more crudely, to get up and perform. Yes, there were “in your face” moments especially as a result of Terry’s challenging nature (see Figure 11), but unlike Rod Quantock and Geoff Brooke’s audience, *The Tram Show’s* commuters didn’t need a funny mask to hide behind or to unite them as a group. They could, as fellow passengers, merely sit there and observe the goings on all around them - much like the pigeonholed, numbered and regulated passengers in the grid of de Certeau’s railway car, or the more passive audience members of a darkened, ‘conventional theatre’ - albeit without the directed gaze demanded by dramatic action taking place exclusively behind a proscenium arch.

Moreover, the “audience space” of *The Tram Show*, to borrow from Gay McAuley’s taxonomy - the “auditorium” part of this “theatre space” (or *lieu théâtral*), (1999 :19) - was not darkened, and the audience view in *The Tram Show* was not directed towards a singular stage; because the action of the play was designed to happen in every available part of the tram - in amongst and all around its spectators. Thus the audience space, the theatre space and the scenic space of *The Tram Show* were, in a further demonstration of Lefebvre’s spatial hypercomplexity, essentially the same thing. There was no escape

As Suzanne Spinner went on to point out there is always another layer of spectatorship going on in the street outside: in the space of de Certeau’s “ordinary practitioners of the city ‘down below,’ below the threshold at which visibility begins” (1988: 93).

Both shows (*Bus* and *Tram*) begin with a paying intentional audience and an intentional performance by actors, and acquire a second audience and a second layer of performance which is neither intentional nor paying. The interaction between the performers, the bus and tram passengers, and the natives met along the way constantly raises the question: “Who is the audience and who the show?” (*National Times* 14, April 1982)

I argue that this ambiguity underpins the appeal of much site-specific theatre, especially when it takes place, like *The Tram Show*, in proximity to a ‘real world’.

Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, argues, in concert with Shanks and Pearson, that “human space” (or “social space”) like physical space was the

product of the “energy deployed within it” (13). This is the energy which might be produced by an improvised fight or the collaboration of performers and audience members around a chook on a pole, or via the authority that an actor playing a tram conductress arrogates to herself simply by virtue of the uniform (her costume) and adherence to an unfolding narrative. De Certeau makes a similar point about the potential for the interplay of spaces where he proposes that “stories carry out a labour that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places” (93). Peter Brook in *The Empty Space* throws the way open for this energy to be deployed in theatre practice with his assertion that: “I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (1).

Accordingly, the energy generated by the text known as *Storming Mont Albert by Tram* with its prescribed incidents and invented characters, bringing their own fictional back stories to bear on a pre-determined set of circumstances, essentially creates the ‘space of the play’ within the space of the familiar public transport vehicle. In a similar way the pole impaled chicken and koala of *The Bus Show*, held by its two principal “characters”, may be seen as effective nodal points for the energetic production of their fictional space. the representational space, the metaphori of *The Bus Show* event.

Another way of understanding how these productions used space relates to Foucault’s notion of the heterotopia as defined in his lecture *Of Other Spaces (Diacritics, Spring 1986)* where the concept of the heterotopia is defined as “a kind of effectively enacted utopia” (24). Foucault then outlined a number of principles that applied to heterotopias, the third of which applies here:

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theatre brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another... (1986 : 25)

There are echoes here of Lefebvre’s ‘hypercomplexity’ of social space when it is ‘intercalated, combined or superimposed’. The key is not so much that these collisions happen, but that the *relationship* between spaces that is thereby uncovered. In other words, the ways in which the performance of a site-specific play *engages* with its space is the key to understanding its popularity. Because it is in this dynamic (the constant, often unpredictable oscillation between fiction and reality, and the alternating suspension/application of disbelief that flows therefrom), that the site-specific play finds its fullest expression. Of course Foucault, in talking about ‘theatre’ here is referring to the stage of a traditional, purpose built building with its dedicated performance area. But the same principle applies (even more so) to something produced ‘on location’ where both ‘stage’ and ‘auditorium’ are contained by the ‘theatre’ of the tram or bus itself,

the no-longer-pretending site of the narrative with its complement of fictional characters (pretending to be real passengers).

Foucault's train, "an extraordinary bundle of relations", also moves *through* a landscape and therein lies the third heterotopia (in addition to tram space and narrative space): the physical and social space of the street, with its complement of potential spectators moving randomly past outside, what Spinner calls the "second audience" and the "second layer of performance".

Figure 6 shows an example of this second tier audience in the form of passengers in a car temporarily halted beside the tram. Traffic rules in Melbourne dictate that people exiting trams have right of way over passing cars who must stop to allow them to safely cross to the adjacent footpath. The occupants of this car seem somewhat distracted and perhaps uncertain about the intentions of *The Tram Show* cast in this regard as they pose for a group shot in the tram's doorways after an evening's performance.

There was also, occasionally a 'third tier' audience if one includes the radio audience listening to the broadcast station 3AW made (in real time), or various people at taxi call centres, or police stations along the way, receiving accounts of strange things occurring on a passing tram. And even though police stations were notified in advance of performance times and intended route, real police officers continued to turn up anticipating some sort of trouble. Matters reached a point after one "high speed chase" in which there were calls to close *The Tram Show* down.

Foucault's idea of the train as being something one 'moves through' translates in *The Tram Show* to an interior space measuring approximately 14 metres long to less than 3 metres wide, which, with 50 seated passengers, did not leave a huge amount of free space to move around. Architecturally, the available common performing space reduced down to two narrow aisles at either end of the tram, with slightly wider areas around the four sliding doors (see Figure 7 for side plan of a W class tram showing front and back cabins partitioned by the two sliding doors) (floor plan pending).

Figure 8 shows the scene, late in the Second Act where the police mistakenly suspect Nigel's briefcase may now contain a bomb. It illustrates how the cast maximized the available aisle space to stretch the action. In this case the police are drawing back as far as they can, fearing an imminent explosion. This was one of those 'robust', 'broad brush stroke' moments O'Toole referred to that were dictated by sound constraints and the "distractions of the passing landscape". In this particular instance audience members at the back (the worse seats in the house), have had to stand up to get a better view. Others have taken

to literally sitting on top of each other in order to maintain a 360 degree point of view. In either case, one confidant way of separating actors from spectators in this image is to ask the question: who is pretending and who is reacting with genuine emotion?

Figure 9 shows ‘the cut’, in filmic terms, to the other end of the tram, the opposite, narrow performance area, where Nigel, mistaken for some kind of terrorist, panics and spills the contents of his briefcase, effectively revealing a film can soon found to contain suspicious herbal material- enough to see him removed from the tram in handcuffs.

At points in the narrative conversations would occur simultaneously in these front and back cabin areas. As in any tram journey no one audience member could overhear every conversation. It was important however, in both the design of the script, as well as the direction and performance delivery of the lines, that certain key plot points (such as the bomb scare scene) were clear to as many people on board as possible.

Thus, in spatial terms, the dramatic potential of a play on a moving vehicle arrives as a result of two deliberate confusions: the blurring of the performer/spectator relationship and the melding of scenic and theatrical territories. Lefebvre shows how these ‘social spaces’ can be produced and Foucault demonstrates that several can be imbricated onto each other and coexist in the one place at the same time. Finally de Certeau links all of this to the business of “ordinary practitioners” experiencing their city by moving through it (as *Wandersmanner*) whose bodies “follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ ...The networks of these moving intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces...” (1988: 93).

All these performance and staging strategies, arriving as a direct result of the site-specific nature of *The Tram Show*, allows the audience to become, not just passengers, but *accomplices* with the cast in a fictional journey that is largely scripted but partly at the mercy of random events. Following Artaud’s prescription, and in a direct application of TheatreWorks community intentions, the barriers were removed, and a direct communication between performance and real world, actors and audience, (who were certainly placed in the middle of the action) was thereby established. What TheatreWorks demonstrated with its *Tram Show* was that in bringing together these various arenas of performance and spectatorship with their divergent expectations, involvements and understandings, a new form of theatre practice opens up and its potential for entertainment amply demonstrated.

Concept and Development (Time and Space)

Theatre practice is no stranger to the idea of a stage on wheels. From the medieval period to early modern times, pious representations of scenes from the bible, ‘mysteries’ and ‘miracle plays’, were organised by the civic corporations, funded by local guilds, and recreated by actors on the backs of wagons which travelled through the European countryside and parked for performances in the squares of small towns and villages. In a strange etymological twist, the two shafts on which such carts rode would have been called a “tram” (OED: 1993).

Storming Mont Albert By Tram grew from a short story of the same name which was written in late 1981 and published in the *Springvale Journal* in January 1982 (Vol 121 No 5 28/01/1982) where it won 3rd prize (\$150) in the paper’s *Age/Journal* Australia Day short story competition. The events of the story were in turn based on an incident witnessed by myself and TheatreWorks founding member Caz Howard on a late night Mont Albert tram in 1980. On that eventful ride home we found a young man having an altercation with an older, clearly inebriated, fellow passenger. Also implicated in their confrontation was a tram conductress and the driver. It was both an amusing and slightly threatening experience, carrying a sense of being trapped aboard a vehicle against our will - with an unexpected and humorous denouement. (see Davies, Paul *Storming Mont Albert By Tram*, a short story. TheatreWorks Archive. Fryer Library. Brisbane. TS.)

The incident reinforced for Caz and myself the idea that trams were places where drama happened all the time. The company had only just positioned itself in Melbourne’s eastern region as a professional community theatre company. It seemed a natural step to marry this outreach ethos with the idea of a play on public transport. The tram provided an ideal means of containing an audience (in order to extract money and attention from them) and required merely the design of a narrative that could encompass the two ‘acts’ of a tram journey (from its suburban terminus to the city and back).

For workshop purposes the text was broken down into units of action, (‘Ejection’ ‘Going Back’ ‘The Hard Sell’ ‘Scream Therapy’ ‘Fatherhood’ ‘The Bum’s Rush’ ‘Arrest’ etc.). In effect these were short, discrete scenes (capsules of action) played sequentially, sometimes simultaneously, within the larger Act structures of the Outward and Return journeys. Script development included the application of certain VCA techniques applied to the ‘discovery’ of character - principles learnt by TheatreWorks founding members as students there.

Indeed, as the average time span of the journey became longer, certain ‘reserve scenes’ were written to fill these potential (and recurring) gaps in the action.

Official suspicion was aroused in the MMTB however, when TheatreWorks issued its tickets for the show - just prior to opening night. Several times larger than a normal travel card, this mock ticket was however based (necessarily – in the interest of preserving the reality of a tram journey) on an actual tram ticket (see attached Fig 10). In fact, the template was based on a used card, so that the blocked up punch hole in this master copy (November 14), is repeated on every theatre/tram ticket issued. In Figure 10 this particular ticket has been punched at ‘May 4’ by Alice as well). However, the evidence of tampering (November 14 covered up) was then used by Morris Stanley to confront some unlucky member of the audience with criminal fraud. The discomfort this spreads through an audience on realising that all their tickets are similarly ‘modified’, and that they are all potentially guilty, again implicates them in the story. They could all be picked on by Morris ! Nevertheless, despite the unmistakable exaggerated size difference between a real travel card and the TheatreWorks *Tram Show* ticket (not to mention the TheatreWorks logo), the MMTB issued an immediate fraud alert across the entire Melbourne Tramways system. So that even at the level of its props, there is, in any site-specific production such as this, a frisson between the invented and the real. And from this disruption of found realities with constructed ones, comes much of the enjoyment of participation – O’Toole’s ‘Brechtian ambush’.

A further suite of senses is available to the authors of site-specific plays - beyond those of sight and hearing. When Morris Stanley accidentally stabs Danny (with the retractable plastic knife brought on by Terry), he emerges from the altercation with his hands covered in a red viscous substance, and immediately assumes that this is Danny’s blood. Leaping to the (incorrect) conclusion that he has seriously wounded, if not actually killed the man, Morris wallows in a Macbeth-style shock/horror exit, staring incredulously at the ‘blood’ on his hands, displaying them to startled motorists waiting for him to cross the road in front of them. However, the substance is in fact, merely tomato sauce from Danny’s concealed pie, put under his shirt to keep it warm. But the fact that the audience can already *smell* the sauce amplifies their enjoyment of Morris’s discomfiture. They know he knows they know he’s acting, they know the blood is fake, but they also accept that his character is *not* pretending. It is altogether another order of the notion of suspension of disbelief. And another example of O’Toole’s *metaxis*: the juxtaposing of the real and the fictional, *including* a tacit acknowledgment that such a manipulation is what is going on. In this way the comedic potential of the ticket inspector’s delusion is enhanced and extended, and eventually explained by Danny himself, angry that his ‘lunch’ (the squashed pie) is ruined. But Morris is no longer there to blame ,having sailed off into the night at Kew Junction, startling other members of the public with his incoherent mumbling, feeling guilty of manslaughter, never to be seen again.

There is another moment where smell became a key component, again involving Danny. After Samantha Hart-Byrne loses her balance on the unfamiliar moving platform of the tram, she accidentally plants a stiletto into Danny's foot. Naturally, he reels back yelping in pain and immediately pulls his shoe off to reveal a rubber glove for a sock (because there's holes in his shoes and he wants to keep his feet dry). In most cases, in the Melbourne summer, when and the rubber 'sock' gets snapped off, it was invariably glistening with the actor's sweat. Whether it smelt or not was more a matter of a spectator's individual imagination. Certainly Danny's costume indicated a catastrophic failure of personal hygiene. Extending the olfactory dimension, Danny in moments of action where he wasn't directly involved, tended to go to sleep on an adjacent audience member's shoulder. In the confined space of a tram body odour can be also be major signifier of character.

Critical Reception (Newspaper Space)

Also writing in *The Age* a few months later, Jack Hibberd described *The Tram Show* along with Rod Quantok's *Bus, Son of Tram* as "one of the most original and surreal events ever to animate Melbourne theatre"

According to Phillipa Hawker in her review for *The Age* ("Stormtroupers hit Mont Albert Track" 4th March 1982: 9) the off-duty policeman referred to by Leonard Radic, who intervened to arrest Danny, decided to stay on board and watch the rest of the show. Although this is disputed in Simon Kinch's account in the *Nunawading Gazette* (17th March 1982) where he claims the "embarrassed off-duty policeman apologised and got off at the next stop." 'Peg' in the *Progress Press* also claimed the policeman "joined in the laughter on finding he had bumped into a travelling show (3rd March 1982: 17). Clearly this incident of Danny's fare evasion became an iconic part of the mythology surrounding *The Tram Show* and is probably one of the best examples of the intercalation of all the social and physical spaces in the production.

for *Theatre Australia* Spinner found the play had "created a complete event that is more than just being on a tram with a group of actors. The event they have created, like real-life, has a multiplicity of focus and the script is only a part of it: what is really at issue and of interest is *the subversion of the boundaries between theatre and life* (May 1982 emphasis added).

Ed Southern writing for *The Camberwell Free Press* described the show as "the world's first-ever play on a tram" (arguably still). In a subsequent article Southern confidently dubbed it "one of the most popular shows playing anywhere in Australia." He found it to be an "inspired piece of lunacy" and felt it should become a "future must" on the Mont Albert social calendar. "The play

IS the people on the tram...where the funniest things happen...

The Box Hills *Eastern Standard* in an article called “Rolling Theatre” found the production “unique” and “intriguing” (20th April 1982) while the *Nunawading Gazette* headlined its review “Dastardly Doings on the 42 Tram”, noting the show’s ‘riotous debut’

Ken Healey in *The Canberra Times* spoke of the “remarkably different” *Bus* (an extraordinary piece of theatre) and *Tram Shows* as part of a “theatrical upheaval”. In particular he found the latter to be “unique and precious and must be preserved.” He also recognised the difficult nature of the relationship between text and space and put his finger on the spatial intricacies involved:

Technically, it is fascinating to watch the cast trim its ad libbing to the actual time between stops...(d)ebriefing in a café at the Mont Albert terminus is an enjoyable, almost integral part of the night’s experience...There is something very special about this project, which Melbourne must not let slip out of its communal life. Not only are trams virtually unique to Melbourne, but the possibility of stylising some of the events that all tram travellers have seen has been realised triumphantly. Television brings a form of drama to where we live; this play brings live theatre into the public space we share, not like street theatre, at which we are passing spectators, but to a defined space of which we have elected to become part for a specified time...This is not however, risk-taking theatre in the way that Rod Quantok’s virtually unscripted invasion of Melbourne street life is risk-taking...Actors from TheatreWorks... are simply revolutionising theatre space by performing a play as though it were life, in the safety of a moving tram.” (“Re-enactment of real-life fiascos” 25th April 1982: 8.1982).

Like San Francisco’s cable cars, Healey referred to the tourism potential of the piece and went on to imagine four different tram shows running simultaneously, with different stories in different parts of the city- the “flavour” of each show influenced by local character and characteristics. His dream embodies a wonderful vision that so far remains to be fulfilled.

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