

# MELBOURNE'S PLAYS ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT 1982 -1994

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## Collisions in Space

At around 9.20 pm on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1982, in Victoria Parade Melbourne, a collision of physical and social spaces occurred which, I would argue, was unique in the world at that time. Physically speaking, two buses heading north towards Fitzroy, deliberately blocked the tracks of a tram heading east to Mont Albert. The event was recorded by Suzanne Spinner 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).

Much of the appeal of TheatreWorks’ site-specific productions lay precisely in disturbing this ‘usual division’. By mounting works in found spaces the company set in train a dynamic actor/audience relationship that proved immediately popular. Starting as *Storming Mont Albert By Tram* in 1982 and then moving to the St. Kilda line and later the Glenelg route in Adelaide, what became known generically as *The Tram Show* notched up 300 performances during six seasons spread over a dozen years, travelling a distance equivalent to halfway round the world and attracting roughly 15,000 paying customers. These were less the passive witnesses of a traditional ‘proscenium arch’ theatre and more *accomplices* with the performers in an act of public misbehaviour.

In its simplest form, *The Tram Show* is an account of an ‘ordinary’ suburban journey enacted by characters who get on and off a tram as it proceeds along its quotidian route from a suburban terminus to the city and back. In tandem with a certain blurring of the relationship between performer and spectator therefore there was an equivalent collapsing of the normally separate domains of scenic and theatre spaces (as defined by Anne Ubersfeld, and later codified by Gay McAuley in her thesis *Space in Performance*). That is to say, both the ‘theatre building’ itself (the tram) and the locus of the action – the ‘scenic space’ – (a tram) were one and the same thing. Out of these performative ‘collisions’ (actor/audience, theatre/stage, insiders/outside) a genuinely three dimensional form of theatre practice opens up as the production itself affects and is effected by the city it takes place in.

Another way of investigating the social forces at play here is to consider the spatial collisions taking place as an intercalation of Foucauldian heterotopia. Something Foucault defines as a real space “a kind of effectively enacted utopia” which can “juxtapose... in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (24). His idea of the train (23-24) embodies the three main arenas of contention here: 1) **the narrative space** of the play which carries its audience “from one point to another” both figuratively and geographically, 2) the interior **theatrical/stage space** of a tram (“through which one goes”) with its familiar public transport rituals and protocols, and 3) the **external streetscape** which “goes by”, a random, urban reality in which the fictional events of the play take place. Again I argue that it is in the resonance/confusion/juxtaposition of these separate worlds for audiences, that the pioneering importance of *The Tram Show* lies.

### **Why a tram ?**

The search for new performance spaces grew initially from TheatreWorks’ stated aim, as a community theatre company, “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. Fryer Library. Brisbane. TS). The company set out to locate its area of operations in the social demographic of Melbourne’s Eastern suburbs. Although this shifted to the inner South East with the move to St. Kilda in 1985 (where three decades later the company still operates). Along with other small professional companies active in Melbourne in the 1980s, TheatreWorks was part of what came to be described as the “Next Wave” of Australian Drama (see Milne, Radic)

The tram, an item of public transport servicing its suburban heartland, seemed a perfect vehicle (literally) with which to carry forward the company’s objectives. And although there has been some debate over whether plays 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*. Dwight Steward in his study of American street theatre and ‘happenings’ made a similar point at the beginning of the 1970s:

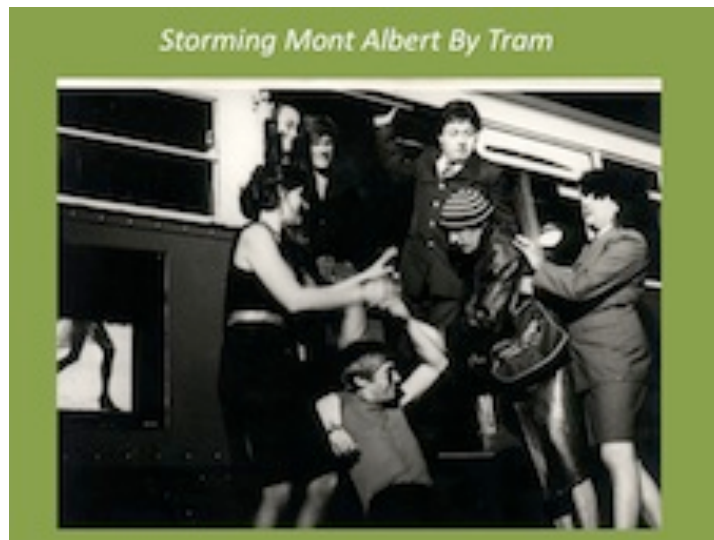
Part of theater’s [sic] power lies in the sense of participation that it gives. The audience shares in an experience, feels a sense of community that they could never get from a novel, poem, or speech. (*Stage Left*: 57)

To which one might now add: could never get from a film, television programme, digital reproduction, game theory, cos play, or an item of social networking. Yet scholarly discourse, including many published accounts of Australian theatre history, has paid little attention to TheatreWorks’ or equivalent companies of the Next Wave, let alone the outbreak of site-specific theatre that flourished in Melbourne throughout the 1980s.

This oversight has allowed certain historical blind spots to emerge, an example of which can be found in Laura Levin’s recent description of *Nights In This City* (a bus show by British theatre group Forced Entertainment in 1995) as “the *celebrated prototype* for urban site-specific work” (*Performance And The City*: 241 emphasis added). Yet more than a decade earlier, Melbourne’s celebrated *Bus Show* carried passengers wearing Groucho masks, who were being lead to improvised performances at random sites around the city by two ‘tour guides’, one (Rod Quantock) holding a chicken on a pole as a rallying point for his fellow travellers, the other, a koala. See Figure 1:



Whereas, the tram it “collided” with in February 1982 contained an audience attending the world premiere of *Storming Mont Albert by Tram*. See Figure 2:



Both *Bus*, *Son of Tram* and *The Tram Show* were classic but quite different examples of the types of site-specific theatre that became commonplace in Melbourne – well before oddly similar “prototypes” in the northern hemisphere.

### Diegetic Space (the heterotopia of the narrative)

Like *The Bus Show*, 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 obnoxious and difficult drunk. Another problem is Terry Meagher, a larrikin punkster who scrambles on board carrying a large plastic dog normally used for collecting money for the Blind Society. 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. The stories of these various commuters unfold and coalesce as they arrive, interact and leave the tram, sometimes involuntarily. Relationships form and fall apart, fares are evaded, confrontations erupt and a threatened hijacking takes place using a retractable plastic knife which is only partly resolved by the arrival of the 'police'. 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. 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... See Figure 3:



Not surprisingly, Geoffrey Milne, in his sweeping survey, *Theatre Australia (Un)limited* found the plot of *The Tram Show* “surprisingly ordinary” (2004: 294). But as John O’Toole recognised, a quality of ordinariness (‘painted in broad brush strokes’, ‘stereotypic characters’) was part of the intention (*The Process of Drama, Negotiating Art and Meaning* 1992:178). He refers to the way in which the script developed through improvisational workshops involving writer, director, cast and a lot of tram travelling. O’Toole understood that the connection being aimed for in the text was between recognisable incidents on a tram *and* the need for humour and dramatic tension:

The team decided that a number of pieces of action should occur among these characters, which should be recognisably within the aegis of a tram journey, *but only just*. In that gap between the expected and the unexpected would lie both the dramatic tension and the humour. All the main connecting incidents of the plot are of this ilk: a coincidental meeting between embittered ex-lovers is both unlikely and believable, until they reveal their true natures, and the audience is immediately in the comic soap opera tension of their bizarre lives and quarrel. A modern audience is familiar with the grandiose concept of a political hijack of a public conveyance, but a tram being hijacked by a derelict with a trick knife deflates it into gentle burlesque. (1992: 179)

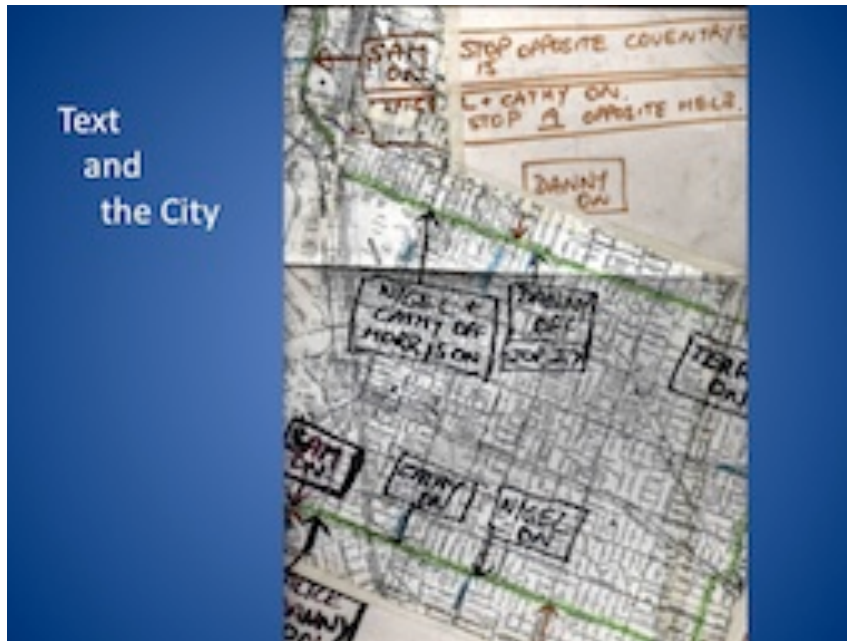
Laurie Landray, in his review, also observed that “(n)one of it was real, but all of it was the sort of thing that could happen” (“Hold Onto Your Seat..!” *Australasian Post* April 8, 1982: 4).

It follows that *The Tram Show*, because of the need to embed itself credibly within the ‘social space’ of its chosen location, required and implemented a certain colloquial inflection both in text and performance.

### **Text and the City**

Because of its reliance on entrances and exits to further the narrative, *Storming Mont Albert By Tram* was also 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. As O’Toole pointed out these have a “finality about them quite unlike a normal theatre; (the characters) can only re-enter where they exited” (1992: 176).

Figure 4, the working master plan used to ‘stage manage’ *Storming St. Kilda by Tram* (Davies 1988), shows a direct imbrication of diegetic space onto cartographic space:



Recognition of the synchronicity of these entry/exit points carried a certain resonance for the audience, given that such transitions had a geocritical logic. On a tram, as in the journey of life itself, what goes around comes around. The inflexibility of the track system and the fact that a tram only ever goes either forwards or backwards was the source of much of the humour in *The Tram Show*. Danny comes roaring back on full of high dudgeon at the same stop where Terry had thrown him off on the way in. Similarly, Cathy and Nigel reboard the tram at the point where they originally got off to have a coffee and chew over old times.

This total 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.

The peripatetic wanderings of Quantock's production, on the other hand, varied its itinerary from night to night. 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. In the case of the 'raid' on police headquarters the reception was described as "decidedly chilly" (Landray 1982:2) See Figure 5:



The narrative events of *The Tram Show* were largely contained within the vehicle itself as it trundled along its predetermined course. Naturally, the action also flowed with certain characters as they left the tram and headed off into the streets outside. Conversations kept going and the reactions of ordinary passers-by were noted as the narrative space of the play intersected with the exterior reality of the street. Thus the script was located in the “real” space of the tram but inevitably tied to the city 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 St. Kilda having been dumped en route to the city from Brighton (an upper-middle class suburb), whereas Cathy, the escort girl, catches the tram from the ‘red light’ end of Chapel Street. 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.

In his summary of Australian Theatre at the end of the 1980s, critic Leonard Radic agreed that part of the “fun” of *Storming Mont Albert By Tram* “lay in working out who were actual passengers and who were the actors in disguise” (1991:176). He refers to one “memorable occasion” in which an off duty policeman forced his way aboard the tram just as Danny is insisting on paying for his fare with an obsolete pound note. The policeman promptly demanded to know how many times Danny had tried to “pull this one on”, and deferring to Alice (as the other authority figure present), offered to “take him into custody” for her - an offer immediately declined by the ‘conductress’, determined as ever to avoid conflict and keep things on her first night running smoothly. Of course Mary Sitarenos, playing the connie, (quite apart from not wanting to see a fellow cast member end up in gaol) knew instinctively that Danny’s character was needed on board for most of the Second Act- the ‘Return Journey’. Radic mentions that the audience “never did discover whether the off duty policeman was real or not, or simply an inventive addition to an already inventive

and lively script” (1991: 176). Thus, although a random element was inherent in the location of *The Tram Show* in its real setting, the performance was largely occupied with predetermined dialogues and interactions, some of which occurred simultaneously in different parts of the tram.

John O’Toole found that this split focus was in part made necessary by the acoustical limitations of the vehicle but was also the outcome of a directorial decision to make the play somewhat “larger than life” in *commedia del arte* fashion (while still maintaining a certain continuity with the mundane, diurnal realities of public transport).

The action also needed to be robust enough, engaging enough and painted in broad enough brush strokes for the audience to follow in spite of the distractions of the passing landscape and the noise of the moving tram... important plot points and character revelations had to be heard right down the car: this predicted very clear, simple and brief dialogue, with a lot of it spaced out so the characters needed within the dramatic logic, to shout at each other. In movement terms, it necessitated a lot of linear movement, with characters needing motivation to move regularly from one end of the car to the other – walking off in pique, moving over threateningly, etc. (*The Process Of Drama*, 1992: 178, 180)

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.

SAM. Oh- they’ve all gone in!  
MORRIS. (PERPLEXED) What?  
SAM. Stop! Stop the tram.  
(ALICE PULLS THE CORD FOR HER)  
MORRIS. What? (PAINED) Oh- you’re *leaving* are you?  
(THREATENING)  
SAM. This is the most upsetting public journey I’ve ever been on.  
MORRIS. And where is madam going may I ask?  
SAM. (PROUDLY) To the Melbourne Theatre Company.  
MORRIS. (HORRIFIED) MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY!  
SAM. Yes you pathetic little cockroach, I’m going to see *Cuckold In The Nest* (WHATEVER’S ON)  
MORRIS. “CUCKOLD IN THE NEST”?  
What’s wrong with my little show- Hmmm?  
(THE TRAM STOPS AND SHE SWEEPS TRIUMPHANTLY OFF)  
SAM. (CONTEMPTUOUSLY) It speaks for itself.



MORRIS MOVES OVER TO THE DOOR, YELLING BACK AT HER OUT ON THE STREET.

MORRIS. Not good enough for you eh? Oh yes (AS SHE CROSSES TO THE ATHENAEUM). Oh yes, go on, go off to your boring proscenium arch melodrama. See if I care (ALMOST CHOKES ON IT) Don't you realise what an adventure in realism this is? (TURNS TO THE PASSENGERS) What's wrong with exciting, innovative, documentary theatre, huh? (BACK AT SAM, YELLING OUT INTO THE STREET) You're bypassed lady! Bypassed! I hope you drop your jaffas! If you'd brought a broom you could've flown there! ...(TURNS BACK TO THE PASSENGERS INSIDE THE TRAM, EXHAUSTED, CLUTCHING HIS CHEST, MOPPING HIS BROW) Excuse me if I seem a little distant from time to time ladies and gentlemen. (WEEPS IT) *Cuckold In The Nest* !  
(Davies, Paul *Storming Mont Albert By Tram* 1982. TheatreWorks Archive, Fryer Library Brisbane. MS.)

*Cuckold In The Nest* was, of course, the title of the play on at the Athenaeum Theatre at that time (February 1982), its posters visible to *The Tram Show* audience across the street. If the tram was stuck at the lights long enough they could watch SAM join the latecomers and move into the theatre, in effect, projecting the diegetic space of *The Tram Show* into the theatre space (foyer) of the Athenaeum. Such transitional elements could be adapted into the script and adjusted from season to season or route to route. For example, the production of *Storming Glenelg By Tram* in Adelaide required adjusting a whole suite of local and geographic references, although of course, the same basic template of a trip from the suburban outlands into the city and back remained paramount.

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" (1992: 166 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)

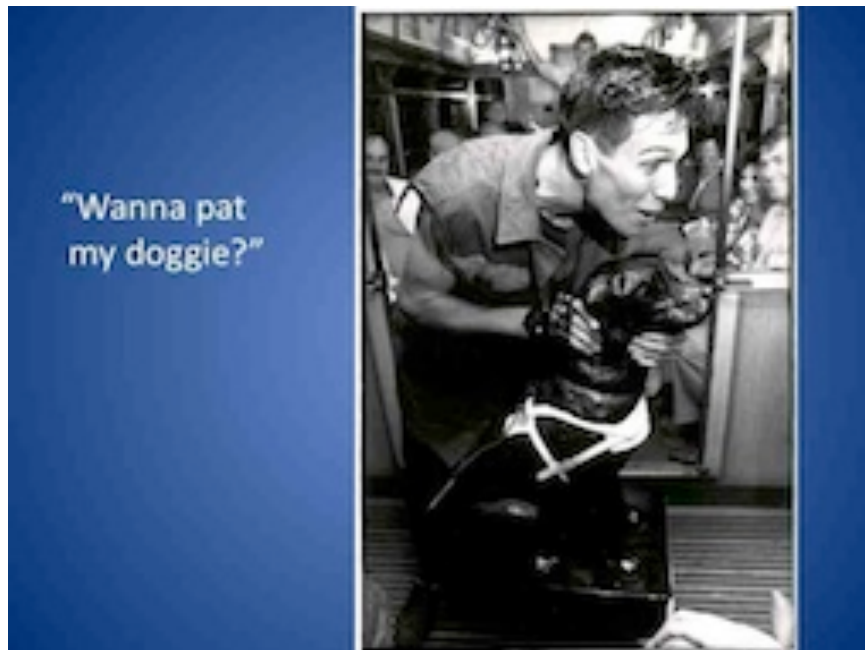
With the story so directly linked to its route, worsening traffic flows caused a certain

inconsistency of scenic duration. This necessitated the casting of actors who were able to improvise *within character* in order to fill in the time (and space) needed to reach the next transition point (exit or entrance). Fortunately, improvisation as a technique was much in vogue within the Drama School of the Victorian College of the Arts, from whose alumni many of *The Tram Show* cast were drawn as the director, Mark Shirrefs explains:

There were a couple of instances where the tram did stop for various reasons but the play didn't stop ...that's why we did so much improvisation... the actors really developed the characters themselves rather than being given them, and my feeling is that worked really well. They were good enough improvisers to carry the thing off when the tram stopped for some reason... The *Tram* and the *Boat Shows* (*Breaking Up in Balwyn* Davies, 1983) were quite unique I think in the sense that you were throwing yourself upon the vagaries of whatever was happening on that particular night. And no night was ever really the same. (Shirrefs, Mark. Personal Interview. St. Kilda. 26 February 2010)

### **The Audience Contract (Spectators and Space)**

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. Although there were some “in your face” moments - especially as a result of Terry's challenging nature.



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 (111), or the more passive audience members of a darkened, 'conventional theatre' - albeit without the unidirectional gaze demanded by the dramatic action taking place exclusively behind a proscenium arch.

Moreover, the "audience space" of *The Tram Show*, to borrow again 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* shared essentially the same architecture.

But as Suzanne Spunner went on to point out there is another layer of spectatorship going on in the street outside:

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/confusion underpins the appeal of much site-specific theatre, especially when it takes place, like *The Tram Show*, in proximity to a ‘real world’. In TheatreWorks’ other plays in found locations such as *Living Rooms* and *The Pub Show*, and to a lesser extent, *Breaking Up In Balwyn (The Boat Show)* this outside reality, the real world of the street going past, is held at bay (or indeed invisible to an interior audience in a house or hotel).

### Performance Space (the heterotopia of the tram)

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” :

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).

Certainly there were a number of fights, both physical and verbal in the play. Conflict was inherent in the way the narrative grew from the divergent types of characters chosen, and further enhanced by the larger than life *commedia del arte* style. Figure 7 also shows how a circularity of spectatorship was built in to the ‘stage space’ of the Tram Show by virtue of the layout of the vehicle as the cast draw back during the bomb scare scene to maximise the available aisle space.

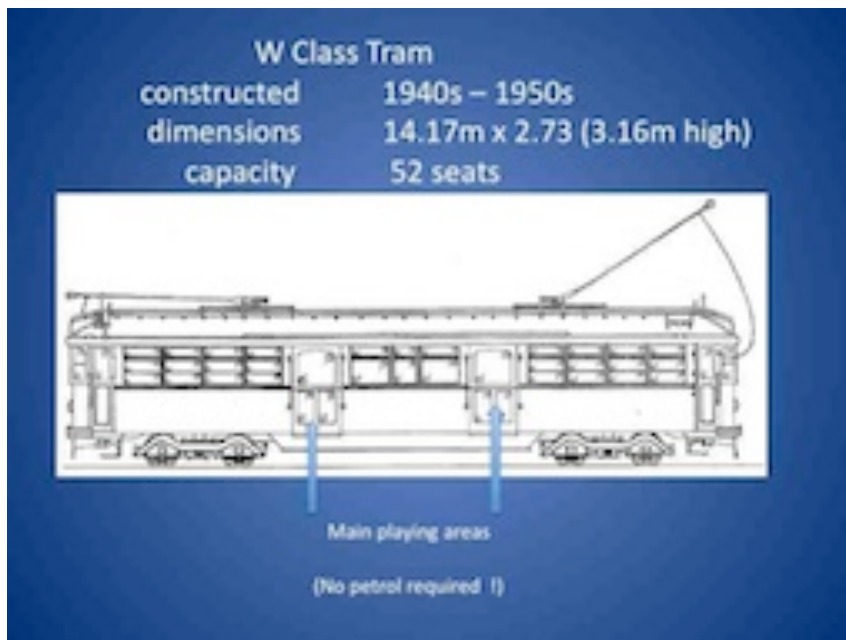


Figure 8 above shows how the open space of the four sliding doorways also offered free space to perform in. Seats in the ‘cabins’ at either end of the vehicle faced towards these central doorways, only the block of sixteen seats situated in the centre of the tram (between the doors) looked both ways (floor plan pending). In either case, no matter where one sat, the audience view was inherently multi-focal.

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, say, or via the authority that an actor impersonating a tram conductress arrogates to herself simply by virtue of the uniform (her costume) and her adherence to an unfolding story arc. 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).

As I’ve tried to demonstrate, 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 actions and circumstances, essentially creates the ‘space of the play’ (the diegetic heterotopia) within the space of the familiar public transport vehicle (the heterotopia of the tram) with its own set of behavioural codes and odd traditions and rituals. 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 *The Bus Show’s* fictional/play space.

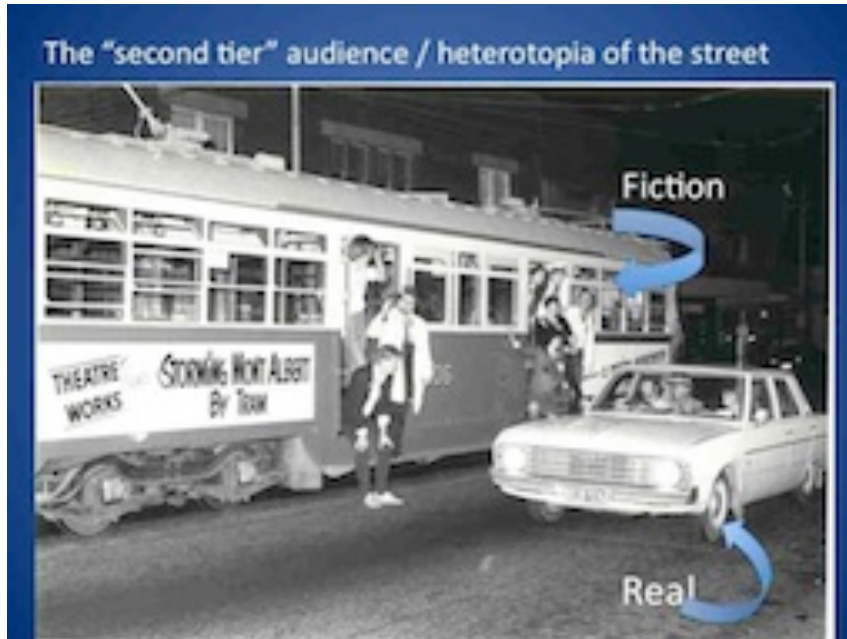
The point is not so much that these spatial collisions happen, but that a *relationship* between social spaces is thereby unmasked. In other words, the manner in which a site-specific play *engages* with its location holds the key to its effectiveness as a dramatic artefact. Because it is in this performative dynamic (the constant, often unpredictable oscillation between fiction and reality, and the alternating suspension/application of disbelief that flows there from), that the site-specific play finds its full expression. Of course Foucault, in talking about heterotopically dense stage space of the ‘theatre’ (25) is referring to the stage of a traditional, purpose built building with its dedicated often rectangular 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 vehicle itself.

### **Urban Space (heterotopia of the street)**

Foucault’s train, “an extraordinary bundle of relations” (22), as well as being something one can move through and something that takes one from point A to B

(physically as well as metaphorically) also moves *through* a landscape and therein lies a third heterotopia with its own compliment of potential spectators, what Spinner calls the “second audience” and the “second layer of performance”.

Figure 9 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 after one performance.

There was also occasionally a ‘third tier’ audience, if one includes the radio listeners to the broadcast from station 3AW made in real time by an on board reporter, 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 on *The Tram Show* anticipating some sort of trouble. Matters reached a crisis point after one “high speed chase” when there were calls from the police to close the whole thing down.

Some of the chaotic nature of the play is recalled by Mary Sitarenos (Alice Katranski in the original production):

“There was an hysteria...I remember the tram driver going fast. Really fast. And I remember bashing on his door ...tap tap tap three times meant ‘slow down’. So I’m bashing his door down. His English was very limited...I’m

saying 'slow down'. I remember faces, faces up close, and faces outside. It was like you were in some kind of tardus. We were just going through time and space, at such a dynamic pace. And it was a very suburban audience. People who had never been to theatre before...whole families hysterically laughing. People with tears streaming down their faces. It was hilarious.

(Mary Sitarenos. Personal Interview)

Her recollection echoes Antonin Artaud's earlier call for a more immediate relationship between performer and spectator:

We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theatre of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it. (1958: 96)

Thus, in spatial terms, the dramatic potential of plays on a moving vehicles 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 one another and coexist in the same 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 thick 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).

In addition to this "urban text" a play produced on location, in and around its audience, offers playwrights a spectrum of sensual expression beyond the usual ones of sight and hearing. When Morris Stanley accidentally stabs Danny (with a 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 the audience and to startled motorists as he crosses the road. See figure 10:

Blood on his hands



However, the red substance is in fact, merely tomato sauce (ketchup) from Danny's concealed pie, tucked under his shirt to keep it warm. 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 accept that his character is *not* pretending. It is altogether another order of suspended disbelief. And another example of O'Toole's Brechtian ambush- the *metaxis* of the real and the fictional, *including* a tacit acknowledgment that such a manipulation is what is going on. In manipulating the olfactory senses, the comedic potential of Morris's delusion is enhanced and extended.

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 hard 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. See Figure 11:



"Hold that for me would you love?"



Whether it 'reeked' or not was perhaps a matter of each spectator's individual perception. 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 great signifier of character.

All of these performance and staging strategies arrived as a direct result of the site-specific nature of *The Tram* and *Bus Shows*. In these plays the barriers were removed and a direct communication between actor and audience, fiction and reality, performance and candid behaviour established and explored. As a result, a new form of theatre practice opens up and its potential for popular entertainment demonstrated.

As playwright Jack Hibberd noted in his review, *Storming Mont Albert* and *Bus, Son of Tram* were two of "the most original and surreal events ever to animate Melbourne theatre" (*The Age* 18th June 1982, Weekender Magazine). Ken Healey in *The Canberra Times* also spoke of the "remarkably different" *Bus* and *Tram Shows* as part of a "theatrical upheaval". He recognised the difficulty of the relationship between text and space:

Technically, it is fascinating to watch the cast trim its ad-libbing to the actual time between stops...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 Quantock'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 real life, in the safety of a moving tram." ("Re-enactment of real-life fiascos" 25th April 1982: 8.1982).

Quoting San Francisco's cable cars, Healey referred to the tourism potential of *The Tram Show* and went on to imagine four different versions running simultaneously with different stories in different parts of the city- the "flavour" of each show influenced by local character and characteristics. Although the success of *The Tram* and *Bus Shows* spawned a decade long engagement with site-specific performance in Melbourne theatre practice generally (a movement that has so far been largely overlooked), the ambitious dream of having four different *Tram Shows* running simultaneously remains to be realised.