

**photofile 75 – in the city. edited by reuben keehan**

getting away with it – kelli mccluskey

**tts: route 76 was part of a quadrilogy of city-specific performances, touring perth, sydney melbourne and adelaide. tts invites audiences to board a 21 seater bus and experience an alternative sight seeing 'terror' tour of their metropolis. using live performance, on-board media, video and wireless audio, the bus navigates through public sites, with on-board tour guides revealing a darker underbelly of a city that is 'alert', 'alarmed' and in a heightened state of anxiety. alongside the action on the bus, mini interventions took place at a variety of key hotspots within the cityscape. the tts body of artwork was devised in collaboration with jason sweeney, version 1.0 [sydney], cicada [melbourne], drive by shooting [adelaide] and a small army of volunteer on-site performers in each city. the tts: australia national tour was produced by artrage and funded by arts wa along with the now dissolved new media arts board of the australia council.**

**tts: route 76 was the sydney version, performed during march 2005.**



*ok cubs, we're in sight of the olympians photogenic, \$102 million dollar face. we will shortly be exiting the bus for a 5 minute penetration. if you could please put on your mobile headsets...*

i'm squatting behind a lamp post, camcorder switched to night-vision in one hand and cb radio in the other, peering thru a piss stained railing that overlooks the southern boardwalk of the sydney opera house. all lights are down tonight, like something is about to, or has just gone horribly wrong with this overexposed icon. easter sunday is apparently the only night in the year when all the fixed external lighting is flicked off, which could account for the sudden increase in security patrols growling around the base of the sails. they've already spotted our on-site performers. dressed in matching tracksuits, they are embedded along the forecourt, perched on steps & benches, casually tying shoe laces, asking passers by for the time, blending in until our audience are all in place. having just attempted to reassure a slightly perplexed guard down at the security entrance about the short 'contemporary dance piece' that would be unfolding in front of them outside in the next few minutes, they keep their distance. we are, after all not doing anything wrong, no protest signs or buckets of red paint, we're just admiring the unlit view and besides, we have a permit. it's official. it must be ok then.

*congratulations on a successful landing, if you could make your way slowly and casually onto the face of the olympian. no one is looking, everything is fine*

audience are spilling out from the tts bus, into the open now. heading single file to stand directly in front of the third 'hot spot' on the tts: route 76 site-seeing terror tour. in tts language, it's referred to as sydney's proud gleaming face. the most photographed icon in australia. they move sheepishly towards the steps, looking around for some visual reassurance that they're not alone in this, that the bus hasn't just left them dumped on the pavement.



*you are a brave young cub. hoo yahh! to your right you should see security patrol dogs, do not make eye contact. keep walking. slowly and casually.*

the audience are following their audio instructions. a calming voice is being pumped through thru headsets connected to cd players which are strapped in a not so subtle, 'suicide-bomb-like-mode' to their stomachs. this prompts a few fidgets from the harbour security crew who decide the best course of action at this point is to stand and watch for any signs of possible misconduct.

*now cubs, re-check your shoes. bend down, remember to bend your knees, bottoms in. that's the way. make sure your in a crouching position. stay there.*

on-site performers begin to move into position. surrounding the audience on all sides. they join in. everyone now seems to be squatting down in the shadows, on the concrete.

*now, listen to my instructions carefully. gradually reach forward with your right hand at a 90 degree angle from your body. and clench your fist.*

there are two people wedged up a tree directly behind me. i can't look over, but I know they're up there. they giggle and i relax. I wonder if they had to display their public liability certificate before climbing that fig tree, does that count as 'appropriate behaviour' in a public space? I guess, its no less odd than the couple having sex on the lawn embankment up here last night, maybe they too had to sign a disclaimer that their actions 'in no way would be defamatory to the international reputation of the opera house'.

*that's the way. ok back to the upright position, slowly. right cubs, slightly arch your back, extend your right arm behind you, bend at the elbow, keep that fist clenched. now thrust your fist forward and release. thrust and release.*



this is quite a sight. around 30 silhouetted figures are hunched over their shoes in front of the opera house steps. they rise, [not quite in unison] and begin to hurl imaginary projectiles towards the dimmed sails.

*down grab aim and throw.*

*now as we all know, facial injuries can be devastating. and again. down grab aim and throw. a direct hit to the face can impact on confidence..*

passers by stop and watch. our audience begin to generate an audience of their own, japanese tourists, some kids, a handful of security guards, a passing ferry, no one seems to quite know how they should be responding. this small public act seems bigger now, we all seem complicit by just being here.

*that's the way, now where's the bus? make your way calmly back to your tts tour guide. the bus will be departing in 10, 9 , 8 , 7, 6...*

as the audience break off and begin to disappear back up the hill, the sky erupts in sudden flashes of light and colour. an easter weekend firework display is launching its own missiles from the harbour. it takes most people left on the forecourt by surprise, [apart from the couple up the tree behind me, who begin to take photographs]. the opera house sails are now backlit, as if this is some bizarre aftershock to the small act of choreographed throwing that just took place. I relay a message back to the bus and chaser car and we chuckle about the fact that audiences might question if that was all part of the work.

I guess everything in the field of vision of the audience during the tour becomes part of the work. their experience outdoors has been soundtracked so that perception shifts & you start to distrust reality. it is, as they say weirder than fiction which works in our favour for this piece of work. walking away with the sky exploding behind you, countdown ticking away in your ears, cd player cunningly disguised as a bomb strapped to your chest after having just pummelled the air in front of the blackened face of the opera house, has got to be up there on the weirdness radar. weirder still the fact that we got away with it without being rugby tackled to the ground by security or a concerned 'alert not alarmed' citizen. instead the moment just passes and fades. we had permission to misbehave this time. maybe terrorists should become contemporary dancers...

kelli mccluskey is a member of perth based new media arts group pvi collective.