CARRIAGE

cultural transports and transformations
of a socially-engaged public art practice

Mick R. Douglas

Doctor of Philosophy
2010

RMIT
Appropriate durable record
submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Mick R. Douglas
M.A. (design)

School of Architecture & Design
Design & Social Context Portfolio
RMIT University
August 2010
Declaration
I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed:

Mick R. Douglas

27 August 2010
CARRIAGE

Cultural transports and transformations of a socially-engaged public art practice

Mick R. Douglas
Acknowledgements

The collaborative nature of my work has only been possible with the many valued relationships that have developed along the way. Neal Haslem has been an inspiring communication designer, valued friend, studio side-kick and sounding-board on all the projects, including bringing his light touch in collaborating on the tramjatra book and now on this document. Big thanks to you big Neal.

Thanks to Peter Downton for his supervision at my side, well measured and supportive. I’m grateful to the many undergraduate students of RMIT University School of Architecture + Design who participated in courses that I offered to search for new project possibilities when they were least known to me, including the Tramjatra, Crossing, LiveHouse, Change Vehicle design studio courses, the Share, Motion Emotion, Travel Tracks design studies courses and the Video Grit elective courses. Jason Parmington, Ramesh Ayyar, Suzie Attiwill and Ceri Hann who joined me in some of this teaching made it all the more worthwhile.

This research has been supported by RMIT University School of Architecture + Design through the School Research Committee Funds and a semester of research leave, for which I am appreciative. I thank my colleagues and friends Soumitri Varadarajan and Malte Wagenfeld in the Industrial Design program for supporting my interests. Ceri, Ramesh, Brittany Veitch and Rochus Hinkel kindly assisted me with the exhibition performance event of this Carriage work.

Full credits for each project are at the end of this document. My thanks especially goes to Roberto D’Andrea, Mahadeb Shi, Aparna Das, Debasish Bhattacharyya, Jayanta Basu, Suzie Attiwill, Jogi Panghaal and Soumitra Das with the Tramjatra project; Durriya Kazi, Iqbal Nusrat, Wajid Ali, Mohammad Nadeem, Safdar Ali, Karen Trist, Marsha Berry, Rob Eales, Don Williams and Stuart Koop with the W-11 Tram project; the cultural transports collective Kate Archdeacon, Rob Eales, Ceri Hann, Neal Haslem, Anthony Hamilton-Smith, Lynda Roberts and Ben Landau, along with Damon Rao, Shreya Gadepallli and Matteo Martignoni with the ride-on-dinner project; Daniel Rechter, Ahmed Sayed, Hamdi Ali, Layla Adem, Maurice Wilson, Mammad Aidani, Claudia Estobar, Jorge Levia, Jane Crawley, Vicky Guglielmo, Shona Johnson, Michael McMahon, and especially Jason Parmington with the LiveHouse project.

For your influence, collaborations and encouragement in one way or another, thanks to Suzie Attiwill, Katy Bowman, David Goodman, Wim Hafkamp, Bianca Hester, Lucas Ihlein, Stuart Koop, Julie McLeod, Scott Mitchell, Stephen Muecke, Catherine Murphy, S.R. Rajen, Marie Sierra, Julie Spencer, Neil Thomas, the Urban Interior research group and the Cactus Channel. Thanks to Daniel, Peter and Lizzy for proof reading this document.

My love goes to Lizzy, Lena and Rachel, with me along the way; and to Eris, Wally and Graeme for being there, even though some way away. I dedicate this to my sister Peta, in celebration of life.
CARRIAGE

cultural transports and transformations
of a socially-engaged public art practice

ABSTRACT

Through a socially-engaged public art practice I explore interests in mobility, hospitality and agency. I have conducted a collection of journey-based projects that explore modes of transport as mediums for public art practice, that mobilise social relations through a play with hospitality conventions, and that perform tactical ways of operating with space, time, movement and people to open up possibilities for dynamic urban experiences. My practice investigates how public art might engender aesthetic and social formations, transportations and potential transformations. The momentum gathered by this research suggests that a socially-engaged public art practice can afford multiple culturally resonant forms of carriage.
# CONTENTS

## I GUIDE

1. travelling with cultural transports and transformations  
   2. itinerary

## II JOURNEYS

1. tramjatra: imagining Melbourne & Kolkata by tramways
2. ride-on-dinner
3. W-11 tram: an art of journeys
4. LiveHouse

## III PASSAGES

1. tracing tramjatra: toward a participatory aesthetic politics
2. uncertain occupation: cultural transports at play
3. situating social contingency and the urban interior

## IV TRAVELLING

*the potential of socially-engaged public art practice*

## V LUGGAGE

*Bibliography*  
*Credits*  
*Appendices*
travelling

I pursue a socially-engaged public art practice impelled by a desire toward unfamiliarity, creative possibility and live adventure. With what a collaborator once described as my *proclivity for fluidity*, I explore interests in mobility, hospitality and agency. This involves a degree of surrendering certain knowledge and entering into a dynamism where one does not know before hand, or to say it more accurately, before creative experience.

You are now in transit. Perhaps you will be leaving some place or some thing behind to join me in this travelling. You might begin to depart static places, fixed ideas and habitual experiences to enter this process now taking place, exploring potential ideas and inhabiting new experiences. A familiar sense of home and certainty might be giving way to an open-ended processual engagement, if only temporarily for the duration of your travel. I invite you to move with me through the modes of my search, tracing out the form of my practice-based research.

I have conducted a collection of journey-based projects over the last decade that enact an inter-play between their paths of investigation and their ways of operating; between research interest and method. My practice through these projects has three evident characteristics. Firstly, modes of transport are explored as infrastructure and mediums for public art. Secondly, social relations amongst individuals, collectives and networks are mobilised through a play upon hospitality conventions. Thirdly, tactical ways of operating with space, time, movement and people are performed to modulate dynamic urban experiences. Through this practice I investigate how public art might engender aesthetic and social formations, transportations and potential transformations.

with

I am embedded in the middle of—producing and being produced by, moving and being moved by—these motion-based operations of practice-based research. I manifest and convey the research here according to the ways of operating and the forms through which my practice is made and remade.

My hospitality attempts to also situate you, my reader, with me in the middle of my practice as the most appropriate and potentially rewarding means of sharing a practice-based knowledge. What you encounter
moving through this body of work is a milieu where lived engagements with mobility, hospitality, agency and practice are in carriage. I attempt to amplify the elements at play in the work as a means to stimulate knowledge development and transmission through praxis.

Being with you now is a collaborative event of mutuality that we both contribute to. My interest is to create a dynamic space, a time and a feeling of movement and possibility that accommodates you and I and the others that may join. Engaging in relations with others is the social potential of the public sphere. I have drawn upon notions and practices of hospitality to explore the ways that public art projects are always constituted in relation to contextual conditions and networks of power that may be more or less accommodating of aspirations for socially-engaged public art. I am interested in public art practice that explores the making, challenging and re-making of relations to these contextual conditions through participatory public art projects. I endeavour to explore ways that public art can test the affordance of its constituting relations, in ways that both extend the range of diversity that may be accommodated through “public art”, whilst simultaneously acknowledging, and playing with, the impossibility of pure unconditional hospitality.

cultural
The ideal of hospitality is itself constituted with dependence upon the formation of sovereignty. The border defining a form of sovereignty—such as the territory of a property, a cultural identity, a nation, and even a said “public art project”—is a threshold at which filtering takes place determining that which is received hospitably, and that which is rejected. Pure hospitality that is totally accepting of all otherness is an impossibility. If such an ideal were actualised it would erode the very foundation of sovereignty that affords the possibility of hospitality.1 Similarly, a truly heterotopic “other space” accommodating of all otherness is an impossibility that we can only approximate with, following Michel Foucault, a kind of mirrored spatiality where “all other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.”2 Many of the projects I will lead you through create, in part, approximations of heterotopias.

---

1 Jacques Derrida articulates the way that hospitality also conditions a violence: “Since there is no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence. Injustice, a certain injustice begins right away, from the very threshold of the right to hospitality.” In Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, Of Hospitality, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 55.

2 Michel Foucault “Of Other Spaces” in Diacritics, Spring 1986, p. 24.
Through the practice of public art I subject the boundary conditions of sovereignty and hospitality to the movement, ambivalence and play in processes of formation, transportation and transformation. Each project gives carriage to a dynamism of tension that enacts, questions and shifts its relation with its contextual conditions. In other words, the projects activate a dynamism between the “work” and “the whole world.”\(^3\) Whereas a static and conservative form of hospitality tolerates the guest whilst preserving its own sovereign authority and power, my practice tends to obliquely disrupt the thresholds of power and make them susceptible to slippage and repositioning. These disruptions are relatively small scaled, at times producing a temporary play of powers akin to the carnivalesque inversion of authority. At best, subtle changes to the distribution of opportunities for human agency are produced. This may be experienced by individuals momentarily, or may become a collective movement of individuals, or may gather and contribute toward an evident cultural momentum or zeitgeist. Whilst my practice is concerned with stimulating potential rearrangements of power relations, I situate this work as a public art practice contributing to participatory cultural production. I do not seek to determine the details of its social effects in the manner that a social scientist could. I direct my focus to the social-aesthetic momentum that projects might afford, returning to my search for the singularity available through practice.

Rather than you and I comfortably accepting and settling into a given power relation between us, I practise ways that provoke us to engage in moving our power in relation to each other, and to our conditions, and to remain open to move again. The tactics of my practice may have us encounter the unhomely and uncanny within; the contradiction and paradox in our situation; the appropriation and inversion of expectations and roles; the co-opting and re-inscription of infrastructure and elements of context underpinning our lives; the re-articulation of habitual passages in everyday mobility; or the intensification and amplification of a particular moment, movement or momentum. I hope to entice you to join me in playing with the power between us, twisting and turning it with what curiosity, humour and flirtatiousness we find unfurling in this encounter. We may quash our received assumptions and ignite an improvised engagement in the live present. We are free to travel together and to disembark as we please. Or are we not?

---

I must confess that my practice can have me foregoing an allegiance to people like me (like you?) to explore a potential affiliation with those who are unlike me: a practice that you will later discover Leela Gandhi likes to call the xenophilia of affective communities.\(^4\) I practise with others: making art projects that explore conditions for engaging sociality and making participatory modes of live passage that demonstrate processes of collaborative experience and knowledge production. As with all lived relations to power, there is an implicit politics at play in this orientation of my practice, as I work to create encounters at the “contact zones”\(^5\) between people, locales, cultures, cities and ways of moving and being moved. With you and others, I explore what it is to enact the potential of expressive democracy.

transports

When departing from Melbourne Australia, a creative practice working in the public domain is presented with the challenge, and opportunity, of attending to the possible relations between the sociality of the public sphere, and the notion of autonomy that resides with the modern idea of art prevalent in the West. I attempt to conduct projects that neither, on the one hand, firm up the kinds of ideological positions that can readily characterise activist engagement with the social, nor on the other hand, nor be so readily recuperated into the legitimating framing mechanisms of a modern, postmodern or “altermodern”\(^6\) international “art” enterprise. Yet my practice and projects, like much contemporary “post-medium” and “socially-engaged” art, operate in relation to the tensions between the categories of the “social” and “art”, of “ethics” and “aesthetics”. Unlike other modes of social engagement and practice, aesthetics has the potential to work with the fullness of simultaneity, multiplicity and contradiction. I do not assume anything near total control over the projects of my practice, yet I employ aesthetic sensibilities and concerns to make my contribution to conducting the operations of projects: their kinaesthetic dynamics and affordances; their materialising, spatialising, durational and signifying regimes. The projects I will share with you explore different approaches to engaging with what critic Claire Bishop


\(^{5}\) James Clifford describes how “Cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locales.” in Routes: Travel and Translation in the late 20th Century, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 7.

calls the antinomy of the social and art. Each of the projects conducted gains impetus from a creative practice of working through moments, movements and momentum. These projects are journeys. Each journey manifests attributes according to the differing instances through which you might encounter the project’s formation of a moment, movement or momentum. These journeys give carriage to a proliferation of uncertainties and potentials: to charged moments of aesthetic politics; to progressive change-oriented social movements; to a deterritorialising momentum of cultural openness.

Modes of transport operate as the infrastructure of my public art practice in culturally multivalent ways beyond the simple carriage of bodies and things to and fro. Through investigating the cultural articulation of mobility, I attempt to foster a creative practice which pursues poetic and tactical means to activate thought and action resonant with contemporary processes of globalism, questions of sustainability and issues of trans-disciplinarity. The movement-generating and transportative potential of creative practice is of primary interest.

Metaphor is also a mode of transport. The Greek word metaphora is derived from the root pherein: to carry, to transport. Michel de Certeau reminds us that in Athens, vehicles of mass transportation are called metaphorai: one takes a metaphor to travel, to move. I seek to conduct the potential powers of transport toward open-ended carriage: inciting questions, initiating opportunities for new conversations and fostering circumstances to engage with uncertainty. The projects you will encounter explore gestures and operations to impel multiple forms of movement, and to modulate existing patterns of motion and emotion—including shifting perceptions and affiliations, creating opportunity for learning and change in cultural values, and opening up possibilities for further courses of action.

and

Multiple realms of possibility can be engendered through participatory practices of play. Entering into the unsettling ambivalent flux of arranging and rearranging positions, locations and meanings can affect us to further open ourselves to engaging in dialogue with our circumstances and challenging our received ideas and perceptions. My projects enact

---

7 Claire Bishop is drawing upon the work of Jacques Ranciere when describing the antinomy of the social and art. See “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents”, Artforum, Feb 2006, pp. 178-183.

transportations and transformations without pre-given value attached to mobility, but with an interest in inclusive tactics that revise prevailing hierarchies and unsettle authoritative representations. Combinations collaged, colliding, transposed and transfigured produce possibilities newly liberated from their prior order.

As one project I will share with you reveals, when a Karachi minibus crashes into a Melbourne tram there are surprising consequences. Such practices of hybrid assemblage may be playfully light and simultaneously resonant with implications of political importance. Rather than tend toward the totalising representation of cultural elements, I endeavour for my practice to engage in performative and enunciative actions that perpetually shift and reinscribe cultural meanings.

**transformations**
The journey ahead might transport you in body, thought, emotion and—perhaps—meanings and understanding. Your transport is a conventional expectation brought to the experiencing of art. It may however deliver you back to where you started, having experienced something new, yet with little having changed in your life-world. Or you might undertake a journey of such significance that your subjectivity is transformed by it, or your social milieu inscribes you with a transformation in status. You could expect this from consecrated social rituals such as initiation ceremonies, and rites of passage such as migrations, wedding and funerals. (We might even wonder if this is the case for awards of Doctoral degrees.) Beyond the experiences and life changes of individual subjects, the social realm undergoes constant transportation and transformation, as the “new mobility paradigm”⁹ we evidently live with makes us aware of unprecedented flows in people, information, objects, services and capital.

The journeys that I guide you toward explore how the conjunction of processes of transportation, and transformation of cultures, affords an art of mobility. Rather than assuming the realisation of prefigured effects or goal destinations, a particular emphasis, impetus and pace emerges with each journey, varying from cultures transported and transformed (in the tramjatra project), the transporting of cultural transformation (in the ride-on-dinner and the W-11 Tram projects) to transforming transported cultures (in the LiveHouse project). These journeys are not isolated temporal trajectories, but rather are layered with iterations and reiterations that gather an elliptical, self-organising and singular logic.

After more than a decade working through my modes of practice I playfully describe my occupation as carriage artist. You will soon encounter how I work to transform modes of transport into mediums of art experience; to shift perceptions of what is potentially possible by derritorialising claims of what is actual; to make conditions for others to embody the experience of interconnectedness of life-world qualities that are too often abstracted into categories (say, the social, technological and ecological; or motion and emotion; or try Aristotle’s theoria, poiesis and praxis; or make up your own!); to enable new kinds of mobility of individual and collective human agency; or to provoke new possibilities for the formation of subjectivity.

As a young man at the formative age of eighteen years I experienced standing beside and carrying my sister’s body in a coffin after her death in an automobile accident. The enigmatic significance of her tragic death and that funeral event has lingered strangely. At times I have subsequently felt and thought myself—and the cultural milieu in which I had experienced life to that moment—to have an impoverished capacity to live with such enigma. You and I might speculate that my creative practice conveyed here has been, in never to be certain ways, unconsciously figured by the spectre of this experience. We subjects all bring idiosyncratic experiences and attributes to imbue the formations, transportations and transformations of our lives with both singular and social meanings. Perhaps by acknowledging and exploring this particularly personal form of debt with you here I am granting the spectre of her death and my own life’s agency a celebratory carriage. Yet this account, like all accounts, and the accounts that follow of my socially-engaged public art practice, are only ever partial and incomplete. All is in carriage.
Creative research that investigates concerns with experience, situations and live practice faces particular challenges when seeking to invite engagement retrospectively, after the event. We are confronted with the question of how to engage with the core value of live experiential presence if the actual moment has passed. As someone oriented to the value of practising my creative endeavors, I am less satisfied by that practice—have less to feed it and gain less feedback from it—if I distance myself attempting to stand outside the project work, talking about and theorising it. I attempt to address this issue of live experience by making new aesthetic forms that can engage and give carriage to the retrospective dimensions of a project simultaneously with the newly-being-made present dimensions of the project. I try to shift project “documentation” into new aesthetic forms and formats that situate both myself, the practitioner, and you, my collaborator, into a relation with the work that has us inhabiting and interacting with its present effects. My endeavor to practice an embodied criticality is transferred through the forms in which I manifest the work, and offer it for your encounter. Most evident to you already will be multiple kinds of forward oriented, narrative and journeying senses of movement. As we travel into the following pages of this document you will note that it is arranged into two sections, titled Journeys and Passages.

The Journeys section is comprised of four process-based projects each exploring the form of an experiential journey in different ways. For a summary of each project journey, links to the online digital archive of the project journey, and further journey documentation, I encourage you to refer to the coloured Carriage Notice at commencement of each of the journeys. Each project journey explores an interrelated play of three elements: infrastructure (including modes of transport, transport vehicles, and tools); a network of social relations (including my own artistic role, the key actors and the institutional power players in the network of the project); and a repertoire of artistic tactics that have been enacted to modulate the encounters between space, time, movement and people through the performance of the project journey.

The first project tramjatra: imagining Melbourne & Kolkata by tramways explores a dialogue between two former British colonial cities through the medium of tramways to manifest a network of temporary public art works, participatory events and publications in both cities.
The *ride-on-dinner* project investigates interrelations between the human body, a temporarily collected social body of cyclists and the body of a city. A series of urban meal adventures are hosted as a mobile performance event that acts out relationships between transportation systems, food systems and social systems. The *W-11 Tram: an art of journeys* project transposes the experience of a journey in a Karachi minibus onto a Melbourne tram journey to explore a hybridised space of hospitality. This project was undertaken over two seasons in Melbourne, firstly for the Cultural Festival of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games and then for a second season of summer 2006-2007 involving a series of social encounter events aboard the tram whilst circling the city. The fourth project *LiveHouse* creates ways to explore participatory social dynamics in an inner city State Government Housing Estate that accommodates a high proportion of recent and established migrants.

The pages of the *Journeys* section offer three differing and intermixed types of material through which to retrace how each project journey unfolded. Left-hand-side pages provide a partial narrative account of the project’s emergence, development and current status. A travelogue on right-hand-side pages records information along a timeline. Entries to the travelogue vary from statements of verifiable facts and actions taken by actors, to notes of moments of intensity. A selection of still photographs, traces in their own right, provides a third account at the end of each project journey. These three contrasting modalities of project accounts are hoped to affect a dynamic space for re-combinatory perception in which you may experience weaving together your own account of the journey ahead of you.

The *Passages* section of this document is an elaborated explorative retracing of the project journeys. Three text passages situate you to traverse a different line of thought through one or more of the project journeys and differing aspects of my practice within them. You move through a weave of experiential narrative and reflective analysis that aims to evoke embodied ways of articulating, demonstrating and sharing practice-based knowledge. Each passage is intended to be a rewarding experience for readers without necessarily having read other components of this document. Readers moving sequentially from *Journeys* to *Passages* will experience a partial reprise of some earlier mentioned aspects of the journeys. With these operations of moving onward, doubling back, tracing over, reiterating and re-emphasising, an elliptical pattern will begin to emerge in your travels through this body of work.
The first passage traces through the *tramjatra* project—the project of the longest duration (exceeding a decade)—to articulate concerns of participatory aesthetic politics. The experience of walking the tram-tracks of both Melbourne and Kolkata at night with key project collaborators is narrated as a participatory means of testing a three-fold operation: tracing back over our conduct; enacting a methodology of embodying our engagement across the two cities; and working toward future project potential. Building upon the project’s premise of dialogical comparativism with Edward Said’s notion of the contrapuntal, I suggest a dynamic of *contra-momentum* as a way to further engage in the complexity of postcolonial aesthetic politics raised by such a project.

The second passage reiterates the encircling lines of the *W-11 Tram* and *ride-on-dinner* projects to elaborate how my practice plays with uncertainty in occupying place, position and practice. These projects explore possibilities and limits for hospitality and conviviality in the public domain. The passage takes a speculative path through issues of power and its temporary, creative distribution amongst participants gathered for their engagement in the public art project. I propose how socially-engaged art practices might reveal the potential of contingent social relations being moved by an affective reciprocity of care, generosity and hope.

With the backdrop of increasing urbanisation, housing redevelopment, the global mobility of populations and recent migration to Australia, the third passage traverses the dynamics of the *LiveHouse* project. The opening and closing of the physical *LiveHouse* modified shipping container acts as a figure exploring interplay of the sedentary and the mobile, of sovereignty and fluidity, of impulses containing and releasing, and how these affect the potential of contingent social encounters in the public domain. Rather than affirm these dichotomies, this passage explores how a play upon conventions of hospitality might activate contingent social relations. By animating the contradiction inherent in attempting to *situate* social contingency, this public art project contributes to the formation of new local modes of sociality and allows speculation on what a cosmopolitan urban interior could be like, in contrast to the former national identity engendered by the White Australia government policy that was abolished in 1973.

The last section titled *Travelling* speculates on the potential of my socially-engaged public art practice, and is intentionally left blank in this edition of this document. In October 2010 the exhibition and performance presentation of this practice-based research will take place, involving appropriate means of giving carriage to this body of work.
so that it may be encountered by and shared with you, in addition to being potentially encountered by others beyond this academic research context. Documentary evidence of the exhibition performance will be included in this document section prior to archiving.

The bibliography list includes the broad references that have informed my practice. As I do not consider my research to follow directly from the diverse discourses from which readings are drawn, many readings and exemplary creative practices referenced are not directly discussed in this document. By listing them here I acknowledge their role in informing and relativising my practice.

Appendices only with this examiners’ travel pack, include material fragments from the fore mentioned project journeys. Of most note is the book Tramjatra: imagining Melbourne & Kolkata by tramways, co-published in India and Australia. Tickets, invitations and print items from projects, along with a cloth napkin, are included to enrich your encounter with the work.

Let me remind you again to visit the specific online digital archives for each project to view video, images and participant discussions.

So welcome. Shall we depart?

tramjatra
www.tramtactic.net

ride-on-dinner
www.ride-on-dinner.net

W-11 Tram
www.tramtactic.net

LiveHouse
www.livehouse.net.au
JOURNEYS
our breath rises and falls
with the way we move
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey Title:</th>
<th><strong>TRAMJATRA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carriage:</td>
<td>cultures transported and transformed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**JOURNEY TYPE:**

| Motive:   | curiosity |
| Mode Of Mobility: | dialogical |

**JOURNEY ELEMENTS:**

| Infrastructure: | Mode of Transport: Tramways systems of Melbourne & Kolkata. |
| Transport Vehicle: | Trams, tramways infrastructure. |
| Tools: | Tickets, conductor bags, uniform shirts, tram prows, print items, published book. |
| Social Relations: | Carriage Artist: Mick Douglas |
| Social model: | friendship |

| Tactics: | tracking, tracing, networking. imagining, remembering, intervening. conjoining, comparing, collaging. inviting, discussing, reiterating. identifying, modifying, departing. tracking, tracing, networking. |
### Journey Documentation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digital Archive:</th>
<th><a href="http://www.tramtactic.net">www.tramtactic.net</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Reviews:**  
Melbourne’s tramways union strikes for 33 days in 1990 over Victorian government attempt to introduce a new scratch-ticketing system on trams and to phase out conductors. Public rejection of the plan provokes sacking of Labor party Transport Minister Jim Kennan. Tramways is run by State Government’s Public Transport Authority.

Jeff Kennett led Liberal Party Victorian government vows in 1992 to corporatise public transport system.

Mick Douglas explores public art project ideas that engage with the infrastructure of tramways in response to City of Melbourne street rejuvenation programs and for Master of Arts research.

Roberto D’Andrea active as a Melbourne tram conductor, tramway union depot delegate, senior tram conductor trainer, Met Ticket Taskforce member and vocal media advocate of tramways and tramways community culture through South Melbourne tram depot.

Mick funded to develop “tracking” arts project and meets Roberto at South Melbourne tram depot, striking up a strong working relationship. Workshops with tramways workers and users take place and the project culminates in a two-part exhibition at Melbourne’s Linden art gallery. First part is participative. Second part is speculative proposition for a “Tracking Vehicle” in the form of video made with Lawrence Wallen.

Roberto trained by Hugh Waldron to drive all makes and models of Melbourne’s trams, including the heritage and computerised tramcar fleet.

Roberto gathered the help of Mick & Andy Miller to paint a banner announcing a sister tram depot friendship between South Melbourne & Belagatchia depots, to be delivered to Belagatchia by a Melbournian friend travelling to India. Mick and Roberto write to Victorian Transport Minister Alan Brown proposing that Melbourne formalise a sister-tram-city relationship with Calcutta as exists with Vienna and Prague. The Minister does not support proposal.

Calcutta’s tramways union notorious as exemplary model of unionism in communist West Bengal. Public protest at increases in tram-fare are common. West Bengal government policy focused on rural development. Urban infrastructure maintenance and development suffers. The former British owned Calcutta Tramways Company is run by State Government.

Debasish Bhattacharyya writes to organisations world-wide seeking support to lobby for the retention of Calcutta’s tramways under threat of closure by the State of West Bengal government.

Roberto discovers the common British engineering of Calcutta and Melbourne’s tramways and makes friends with Belagatchia depot workers when travelling India as a tourist.

Mick meets Indian designer Jogi Panghaal at an arts conference in Amsterdam, who introduces him to Calcutta filmmaker Mahadeb Shi’s film in-progress Kather Baxo about Calcutta, told through its tramways.
GATHERING MOMENTUM

As the Melbourne trams started plying the streets again after a five-week service strike in 1990, it dawned on me that this city was not itself without its tramways flowing. Melbourne’s older W-class trams had undergone a fifteen-year arts project from 1978 till 1993 in which local visual artists painted the tram exteriors, until the prospect of generating revenue from advertising on trams eclipsed the project.\(^1\) I was interested in making a kind of public art embedded into the life of the city, its infrastructure and people. In the early 1990s I initiated an arts project working with trams to explore collective memory and civic imagination. This involved hosting workshops onboard trams to learn of people’s experiences of the city through trams.\(^2\) I became involved in tramways workers’ and users’ concerns about the loss of Melbourne’s tram conductors as a consequence of the government’s introduction of an automated ticketing system. I began exploring a notion of tracking and speculated upon the possibility of a “digital museum of civic memory and imagination” on tram tracks—a tracking vehicle.\(^3\) Tramways had winked at me as a potential medium through which to artistically explore cultural and environmental concerns.

Connections with Calcutta (soon to be renamed Kolkata) in India started cropping up. In that city, scientist and tramways activist Debasish Bhattacharyya was writing letters seeking international support to argue for retaining tramways in Kolkata. Mahadeb Shi was making a film on Kolkata featuring the tram as central character and Jayanta Basu was feeding the Kolkata press with stories of environment and transportation. Roberto D’Andrea was working as a Melbourne tram conductor and becoming a key collaborator with me in my construction of a participative arts project. Roberto had been magnetically drawn to the Kolkata tramways while on holiday in India. I came across a letter from Debasish seeking support. Curiosity got me. I proposed to Roberto that we respond to Debasish.

Could we understand the urban condition through tramways? What might be learned from the logic of this non-linear system of movement at a time when the folly of various sorts of rationalisms dominated? Working back and forth in a dialogue between Kolkata and Melbourne promised the opportunity to question, to be challenged and to learn with others. Could tramways be an artistic medium through which to explore the challenges of social and environmental issues and increase global awareness of these issues?

Initial activities were simply premised on the basis of exploring friendship, with the stated name and objective of our efforts falling under the self-explanatory banner “Melbourne-Calcutta Tramways Friendship”. Bimal Maiti, a Bengali signwriter working in Melbourne, had translated my word/concept of “tracking” to the word “tramjatra”\(^4\)

---


Mick learns of Debasish Bhattacharyya’s letter to Melbourne NGO PTUA Public Transport User’s Association seeking support to lobby for the retention of Calcutta’s tramways. Mick & Roberto write to Debasish offering to undertake a similar process to the “tracking” project with Kolkata tramways workers and users.

First of Melbourne’s tram conductors is withdrawn from Camberwell Depot.

Mick withdraws out of planned September trip to Calcutta with second child due. Mick & Roberto write to Calcutta Tramways Company (CTC) Manager offering Roberto’s services to work onboard Calcutta’s service trams, aiming to celebrate Calcutta’s tramways by lending Melbourne’s performative culture of tram conducting. Offer accepted.

Roberto prepares to undertake a self-funded trip to Calcutta. He makes documentation of Melbourne tramways including photography, technical specifications and poetry. Roberto opens up liaison with Melbourne’s Bengali community via Bengalis working at South Melbourne and Malvern Depots. Tram poetry of Malcolm Just is translated into Bengali to produce small books for Calcutta.

ABC television screen 7 minute film segment on Roberto in Calcutta on national television in global current affairs program “Foreign Correspondent”.

Roberto & Mick make a temporary installation exhibition on W-class tram 1036 featuring Roberto’s photography of Kolkata’s tramways and its people, and large bi-lingual names of Kolkata tram destinations on the tram windows. Launched by Liberal Party Victorian Minister for Public Transport Robin Cooper. Receives wide media attention in Melbourne & Calcutta. Roberto conducts onboard this regular service tram for four weeks dressed in Calcutta tramways uniform.

Mahadeb & Mick exchange video samples of their tramways film work by post.

Debasish accepts offer.

Roberto works onboard Calcutta trams alongside Calcutta tram conductors for four weeks during the Durgha puja & Kali puja festival period. Roberto displays Melbourne tramways materials in a tram and distributes Melbourne tram tickets dressed in Melbourne conductor’s uniform of shorts and long socks. Attracts front page daily newspaper and television coverage. Key collaborators include Debasish, CTC Nonapakur tramways workshop manager S.K. Mitra, & Belagatchia depot staff. Supportive press include Manosh Ghosh at the Statesman Newspaper. Roberto brings together a meeting of tramways management, workshop staff and union officials—the first meeting of these groups for some time.

ABC television (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) shoot a 7 minute film segment on Roberto in Calcutta for national television about the project.
in preparation for my first trip to Calcutta in 1997: the English word “tram” conjoined with the Bengali word “jatra” meaning journey, or trip. Unbeknown to me, this hybrid word “tramjatra” was set to reveal multiple resonances. After four years of the largely self-funded activity of my collaborator Roberto D’Andrea and myself, I initiated a moment of transition by turning a corner, so to speak. I commenced investigating funding possibilities for the project and commenced this practice-based academic research as a mechanism of practice-based-knowledge development. I conceived of an informal non-organisation entitled “tramtactic” as both a rhetorical device and pseudo organisational entity through which to symbolically undertake the project, whilst simultaneously linking the project with the academic research sector. These shifts increased the involvement of other stakeholders, and increased the capacity and impact of our efforts to contribute to processes of cultural production and change. Inspired by the enigmatic hybrid word/concept of “tramjatra” and its open-ended potential, I set about constructing conditions which enabled a reciprocal series of intensive activities to occur in both cities over 2001. I found myself in an ambiguous and open-ended set of affiliations that had me occupying project roles of friend, organiser, artist, design academic, curator and producer. I issued myself a mock “ticket” for the role of curator, describing a point of departure as an intersection of dialogue/network, and a zone of travel in the form of the question: What if the net-work of tramjatra were to emerge through a practice of poetic and pragmatic participatory dialogue? After broad discussions I articulated the following set of “curatorial tickets” and accompanying text aiming to stimulate carriage for further project potential.

South Melbourne tram depot closes, previously famed for its diverse and eccentric workforce and communal harmony.

Tramways Union strike on the weekend of the Grand Prix Formula One major event, newly held in Melbourne. Kennett State Government responds with implementing privatisation of the Tramways system to be operated by two competing operators Yarra Trams and M>Tram, and the determined phasing out of conductors and introduction of the MetCard automated ticketing system onto trams, trains and buses. Problems with the development and delivery of the ticketing machines is publicised.

Mick & Roberto write to CTC Chairman offering to develop a decorated tram exhibition during the Durgha puja period later in the year. Offer accepted.

Roberto engages Melbourne’s technical tramway experts Richard Youl and Barry Nielsen to assemble an informal report on tracks, overhead electrical systems, prioritisation of trams & tramcar maintenance, aiming to provide methods potentially useful for upgrading Calcutta’s tramways.

Mick completes Master of Arts degree “A Tracking Vehicle” on the poetics of tramways.

Bengali signwriter Bimal Maiti translates Mick’s idea of “tracking” to the word “tramjatra” whilst making vinyl-cut lettering in preparation for the trip to Calcutta.

Roberto plays a key role in the formation of the I Prefer a Tram Conductor Coalition—a grouping of former conductors, artists and concerned citizens using performance-based activism to lobby for retention of tram conductors. The “Full Monty” action (as per the film) on the steps of the Melbourne Post Office receives national and international media coverage. The plight of Tram Conductors gains support from local cultural groups including Circus Oz. Melbourne author and journalist Keith Dunstan writes a prominent article in Melbourne’s The Age newspaper titled “Ratbag Ambassador Stays On the Rails”, describing Roberto’s advocacy of tramways, tram conductors and tram culture in Melbourne and Calcutta.

Roberto & Mick collaborate in open-ended work in Kolkata. Roberto distributes Melbourne-Calcutta Tramways Friendship tickets and installs his enlarged photography in tram depots. Mick leads work at Belgatchia depot to develop installation exhibition “Calbourne” on service tram 609 featuring eyes as doorways, bi-lingual window text of Melbourne / Calcutta / tracking / tramjatra, painted expressions by workers and Roberto’s photography. Tram is launched by West Bengal Transport Minister Dilip Chakraborty. Roberto & Mick work on the the tram distributing friendship tickets for 3-7 weeks. Key contacts include Debasish, environmental journalist Jayanta Basu, Mahadeb, Nonapakur workshop manager S.K. Mitra, regional tram works manager K.K. Guin, Financial support is provided by Australia Council for the Arts, with in-kind support from Softline Advertising executive Bitan Roy, who holds the rights to advertising on trams.

Public tramways forum convened by Jayanta at Max Mueller Bhavan including film screenings by Mahadeb & Mick and speakers from Calcutta police, CTC management, Jadavpur University, Debasish, Roberto & Mick. Supportive press continues to include Manosh Ghosh and Sunando Sarkar at the Statesman Newspaper.

ABC television shoot a further 7 minute film segment for Australian television about the project’s further development.

Mick encounters patuas (scroll painters) on the street in central Calcutta and purchases a Hindu mythology pat/scroll.
MOMENT OF DEPARTURE

Melbourne & Kolkata are two cities with tracks of a shared past. Both cities were once the capitals of their respective new nations and regarded by the British in the late 19th century as “jewels” in their imperial crown. Both cities have prided themselves on being national centres for the arts, and both are the only cities in their nations to have continuously retained tramways. The first fleet of convicts to arrive in Melbourne’s Port Phillip Bay were indeed delivered by the British cargo ship *HMS Calcutta*—an indication of the linkage that Kolkata, Melbourne and Britain have shared through global movement. *Tramjatra* re-iterates these links between Melbourne & Kolkata in new ways through the medium of tramways.

This journey by tram travels over tracks that are embedded in our histories, for tramways are woven into our experiences and stories of these cities. Tramways move us collectively as an electric mode of transport with low negative emissions into the urban air stream and with the durability of vehicles moving along fixed tracks. Trams also move us with more than just rationalist decision-making in mind: they are people-movers that are laced into popular feelings of civic pride. Traveling back and forth, day in and day out, tramways have us inhabit small extra-ordinary experiences of value whilst participating in the larger choreography of a city’s ordinary metabolism. *Tramjatra* employs artful strategies to prompt new lines of engagement within the public realm so that we might imagine the past and future of these cities and their people, travelling by tram in real and imaginary ways.
Mick makes 10 minute short film Tracking between Melbourne & Calcutta documenting the 1997 work in Calcutta.

ABC television screen the second segment about the project on national television in the global current affairs program “Foreign Correspondent”.

Privatising the operation of Melbourne tramways commences.

Last Melbourne tram conductor finishes at Malvern Depot on May 23rd 1998.

Roberto & Mick, joined at times by Mark Misic and Andy Miller, continue to meet to discuss possible frameworks for developing the Melbourne-Calcutta project. Mick advocates resisting a one-way flow of Melbournians to Calcutta in favour of building a mutual exchange into the project and increasing participation.

Roberto stands on behalf of the I Prefer a Tram Conductor Coalition in the Victorian State Government Election for the Upper House seat of Monash Province with 27 tram party policies, influencing Labor Party policy. Labor Government elected with the 100 Conductor policy as part of its campaign platform. The role is subsequently titled “Customer Service Officer” and given a ticket enforcement role but no ticket selling capacity.

Mick presents Tracking between Melbourne & Calcutta as a keynote speaker at a national conference “Art and Community”, Melbourne.

Roberto accepts a redundancy package and ceases to be employed by the tramways.

Mark Misic delivers kits of further information about the Melbourne-Calcutta tramway friendship to tramway workers whilst travelling as a tourist. Mark, artist and former South Melbourne tram conductor, gains media attention.

Debasish Bhattacharyya represents the Melbourne Calcutta tramways friendship project at a “sustainable cities conference” in Manila, Philippines, hosted by United Nations.

Mark Misic delivers kits of further information about the Melbourne-Calcutta tramway friendship to tramway workers whilst travelling as a tourist. Mark, artist and former South Melbourne tram conductor, gains media attention.

Debasish Bhattacharyya represents the Melbourne Calcutta tramways friendship project at a “sustainable cities conference” in Manila, Philippines, hosted by United Nations.

I Prefer a Tram Conductor Coalition win Best Float prize at the Melbourne Fringe Festival parade featuring a truck dressed as a tram with dancing connies and Circus Oz performing a parody of an automated ticket machine.

Melbourne’s Moomba festival consult with Roberto & Mick about shifting the event’s focus from Yarra river flotilla to a tram parade.
**ZONE OF TRAVEL:**
What if *tramjatra* were to enable its participants and passengers to act upon their creative and critical potential?

**POINT OF DEPARTURE:**
tickets / action

*tramjatra*

**ZONE OF TRAVEL:**
What if *tramjatra* were to generate momentum from the transforming potential of dialogue?

**POINT OF DEPARTURE:**
repetition / difference

*tramjatra*

*Tramjatra* is built on a friendship between tramways founded at a time when Kolkata’s tramways faced the threat of closure and Melbourne’s tramways were undergoing privatisation and tram conductors were being de-commissioned in favour of an automated ticketing system. The friendship has grown much since 1996 when Melbourne conductor Roberto D’Andrea worked on Kolkata’s trams dressed in a Melbourne tram conductor’s uniform, distributing free Melbourne tram tickets to a curious Kolkatan public. A number of installation exhibitions on service trams in Kolkata and Melbourne in the late 1990s generated much media attention and activated public debate about tramways in both countries. An increasing variety and number of participants and passengers have been drawn into engaging with *tramjatra*, activated by numerous series of fictional tram tickets.

The experience of tram-travel has us reiterate the same tracks in acts that are both a repetition of what comes before and an inscription of new differences. Just as the tram gathers together individuals from different social sectors, *tramjatra* gathers together a diverse collection of people and their ideas to facilitate a collaborative space for dialogue. A diverse collection of core participants has been gathered together by the project to create an inter-disciplinary and inter-cultural community of interest that includes tramways workers and management, creative practitioners (sculptors, filmmakers, painters, folk artists, designers and architects), social activists, scientists, engineers and business people. With a willingness to engage in unique opportunities for dialogue, *tramjatra* hopes to extend us beyond our current practices and understandings, to open up ways that might produce a difference, both social and artistic.
Roberto, Mick & Mark decorate “W” class 1014 tram for Melbourne’s Moomba Festival’s Trams on Parade. The “love tram” features Roberto’s photography in Melbourne & Calcutta & bi-lingual text, conductors dressed in part Melbourne & Kolkata tramways uniforms, local Bengali community performing music and children painting what they love on the tram exterior. The tram is launched by Indian Consul General to Australia.

Mick articulates TRAMTACTIC as an informal network organisation and writes the tramtactic manifesto statement.

Mick presents paper “tracking a tram-way of knowing” at Design+Research conference in Milano, Italy.

Mick writes tramjatra curatorial tickets and seeks out Melbourne artists to participate in the project. Through regular conversation with Suzie Attiwill and Jogi Panghaal, Mick articulates their role in the project as critical passengers.

Roberto meets Mike McGufficke of Melbourne track junction manufacturer Davies and Baird at International Light Rail Conference held in Melbourne.

Mick & Roberto negotiate with the now Labor Party Victorian State Government Minister for Transport Peter Bachelor to fund a tramway technical exchange as part of tramjatra, which is later granted.

Mick presents tramjatra project at Doors of Perception conference in Amsterdam under an invitation from John Thackara and Jogi.

Mick meets new CTC Chairman-cum-Managing Director Sudhir De and West Bengal Minister for Transport Subhas Chakrabarty to seek support for a “tramjatra”.

Friendships developing stronger with Debasisih, Mahadeb & Jayanta, who writes an article profiling the project and Mick in the Ananda Bazaar Patrika Bengali daily newspaper.

Mick invited by Jogi Panghaal to present tramjatra project and Tracking between Melbourne & Calcutta film at National Institute of Design as part of Doors of Perception conference.

Mick, Mahadeb Shi & Aparna Das meet patuas of Naya village in Midnapore, and sleep on the floor in Dukhushyam Chitrakar’s hut. Mick commissions 12 patuas to develop pats about tramways in the life of Kolkata.

Calcutta is officially renamed Kolkata, based upon the name of one of the two villages from which the city emerged, Kolikata. It is proposed tramajtra should adopt the new official name Kolkata despite continued popular usage of “Calcutta”.

Patuas present first round of commissioned scrolls to Mick in Kolkata. Second round of scrolls commissioned. Mick develops tramjatra plans in meetings with artist Jayashree Chakravarty via introduction from Alison Carroll at Asialink; with Accord Advertising company with advertising rights on Calcutta trams; with Jadavpur University Department of Architecture staff; CTC Chairman, Nonapakur workshops, Minister for Transport to convey tramjatra plans.

Mick & Jogi seek to meet potential artists to participate in tramjatra via Naveen Kishore, Rustom Bharucha & Biria Academy. Jayanta introduces Mick to Arenundu Banerjee, and Tapash Ghatak of CMDA Environment Cell.

Jayanta writes a profile article about Mick and tramjatra project plans for the Ananda Bazaar Patrika Bengali daily newspaper.
Tramways significantly contribute to the sense of identity of both Melbourne and Kolkata. The tram itself is often employed as an icon of these cities. This mode of mobility offers particular spatial experiences and types of social encounter as it establishes deep rhythms in the city amongst a diversity of transportation forms and architectural types. Whilst Kolkata is stereotypically depicted in international arenas as a heavily polluted and poverty-stricken city lacking cohesive planning, Melbourne, with its rationalist inner urban grid structure, has been tagged a “most livable” city. Both cities are subject to political and commercial pressures that prevent tramways making their full potential contribution toward civic well-being. Mobilising tramjatra is the on-going exploration of the environmentally sustaining and culturally enriching potential tramways hold for their cities. Currently there is a lack of language and concepts that may be used to engage with and discuss the cultural and environmental advantages of tramways. Tramjatra utilises the communicative potential of art to incite a diversity of social actors to imagine how tramways and their cities might be otherwise.

A dialogue between Melbourne & Kolkata is that between two sisters born from the same imperial British parents within the shadow of a colonial past. The imperial parent appears absent in the conversation between sisters, but we know it is deeply inscribed. Through an exploration that draws together many threads from the fabric of each city, tramjatra might remain buoyant as a project difficult to reduce to traditionally defined outcomes, but resonant in its provocations to the imagination. Can we re-think anew how we move and are moved? This international tram journey just might inscribe itself into the consciousness of the social fabric of these cities. It might inscribe a historical moment of searching for post-colonial becoming, environmental care and international social equity.
Roberto corresponds with Debasish & CTC worker Mr Palit by postal mail.

Mick secures funding from national, state and local government arts funding agencies and arranges for project to be administered by RMIT University School of Architecture & Design. Mick consolidates curatorial framework and engages participating artists to join Kolkata phase of tramjatra.

Roberto co-ordinates the Tramway’s Union and Preston Tramways Workshop staff to develop a proposal to convert the Tramways Workshops into a Tramway Museum (unsuccessful).

Mike McGufficke of Melbourne tram track manufacturer Davies & Baird agrees to participate in tramjatra Kolkata to conduct a tram track joint audit.

Mick struggles with restrictions to most arts funding in Australia that prevents support of costs for Kolkata project participants to travel to and work in Melbourne. Creative accounting solution found.

Mahadeb Shi’s company Crandasi Productions engaged as producer of Tramjatra Kolkata. Pallavi Biswas joins as production manager and Sanajay Mitra as “Calcutta friend”, who finds Touring Guest House as hub for Melbourne participants.

Melbournian group travel to Kolkata for tramjatra Kolkata event. Group includes Roberto D’Andrea; tram track manufacturer Mike McGufficke, who undertakes a tram track audit with Roberto; four RMIT University Architecture & Design students and RMIT staff Andrea Mina; four artists (architect James Legge, visual artists Lisa Young and Mark Misic, festival artist Amanda King); critical passenger Suzie Attiwill; and curator/producer Mick Douglas. The Touring Guest House and its rooftop garden in old north Kolkata acts as project hub and accommodation. Participating Kolkata artists include Mahadeb Shi, patuas Sarna, Dukhushyam & Rabani Chitrakar, visual artist Jayashree Chakravarty, social activist Sanajay Mitra, painter Hiron Mitra and critical passenger Jogi Panghaal.

Introductory workshop seminars convened with participants including CTC Manager-cum-Director Sudhir De, development worker VR Ramaswamy, architect Manish Chakraborti, a former tramway union leader, Jadavpur University Architecture Prof. Samir Rakshit, Greenwaves School, filmmaker Shamal Sengupta, Max Mueller Bhavan cultural staff SR Raman and scholar & teacher SR Rajen who is engaged to liaise with patuas.

Jayanta initiates meetings between Mick and Mayor of Calcutta Subrata Mukherjee and the Commissioner of Calcutta Police.
MOVEMENT

In Kolkata you boldly stretch out to the handrail as it passes by and take a leap onto the doorless running-board to squeeze on for the ride. In Melbourne the hydraulic-controlled doors open when the vehicle is stationary and you take your turn to step into an air-conditioned cabin. Electric motors whir and hum. There’s a movement forward. A tram journey begins, departing from two tramways cities.

The conductor gestures you to take the vacant seat. I prefer to remain on my feet, from where I can move around and get a feeling for the passage. At one side is the word “tram”, of English origin. To another side is the Bengali word “jatra”. Joining the two has us underway on a tramjatra, a “journey by tram” taking a hybrid path linking two cities. A group of artists, activists, tramways workers and enthusiasts have departed Melbourne and Kolkata to be aboard a tramjatra since 1996, attracting new passengers to join along the way.

Tracks are deeply inscribed in these cities. Some tracks place us on fixed routes, carry us by habit, and deliver us to stereotypes, myths and worn-out positions. Hand-painted billboards viewed from the airport taxi had announced “welcome to Calcutta, city of joy” as my senses detected the familiar sweet smell and stinging to the eyes brought by exhaust gases. The voice of an educated woman in the first class tramcar tells how tiresome it is to witness that path of the firang (foreigner) telling her and the world yet another romanticised hardship story of her city. Back to Melbourne and we overhear the worker in the Information booth beaming about her hometown’s status as “the world’s most liveable city”.

We move in so many different ways. Stationary cars on the street display their Victorian State number plates that are adorned with the slogan of the State Government of the day, or yesterday: “on the move”, or, “the place to be”. I overhear the conversation from the young student couple seated ahead: “but we are moving beings!” They live out their struggle amongst political, personal and philosophical differences. And so it is that state governments in both West Bengal and Victoria have experienced gaining and losing power riding their own tramways policies, just as they have deployed the high public presence of the tram to carry out campaigns of political strategy. “Tram zindabad!” (long-live the tram!) cry Calcutta Tramways workers in alliance to three decades of rule by the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

After all, tram travel is staged on the street. Tram after tram choreograph a beat to the movement of the metropolis whilst tramways infrastructure weaves through the public imagination. Can you reach for the segments of sky overhead that have been cut to shape by those tram-wires? Can you feel the movement on those well-travelled tracks resonating the ground underfoot?

A grimy young man offers his seat to a hard-nosed woman as the familiar ding-ding and screech of metal on metal resounds, and you smell your fellow travellers in close proximity, some for better, some for worse. Being gathered in a tram is a dynamic experience of a community that is constantly created and re-created along the many different lines that pull us together or divide us apart. The tram purposefully gathers us together to move. If globalisation of the contemporary world really does increase the possibilities for criss-crossing connections, who chooses to move with whom?
Temporary installations produced around central Esplanade Tram Terminus.

Tramjatra Tram installation exhibition produced by Jogi and Suzie undertaking special and regular passenger services.

Mick, Jogi & Suzie seek daily newspaper to undertake daily coverage of the project. Suzie Attiwill commences writing a regular “tramjatra” daily column for the Statesman newspaper for 6 weeks, producing 35 columns. Extensive other media coverage of tramjatra with over twenty press reviews.

Transport Minister Chakraborty initiates a “tram-yatra” event (not “tramjatra”) with popular singer Usha Uptal to raise money for an earthquake appeal, with West Bengal government elections due in April. The tramjatra crew are divided about whether “tramjatra” is being appropriated for political purpose. Most Melbournians including Mick return home as planned.

Roberto joins in Minister’s “tram-yatra” plan. Andy Miller joins Roberto in Kolkata and together lead making of painted trams Fruit Tram and Cricket Tram.

Mick leads RMIT design students to make the performance Grooving: Negotiating the Rhythm of a Resonant Melbournian Groove which opens the Melbourne Moomba festival.

Connies performance Troupe conduct at Moomba “Trams on Parade” whilst Roberto in Kolkata, featuring tramjatra & Melbourne-Calcutta tram swap cards. The inspirational role that the Melbourne-Calcutta tramways friendship has held for the Trams on Parade is evident, with festival artist Amanda King painting a “Durgha Tram” alongside traditional Indian dancing performances.

Mick leads RMIT School of Architecture & Design students, (including the four who travelled to Kolkata) in an undergraduate design studio-based project investigating strategies to increase the value of tramways in the cities of Melbourne & Kolkata.

Kolkatan group travel to Melbourne for tramjatra Melbourne event.

Group includes filmmaker Mahadeb Shi, patuas Dukhushyam & Moyana Chitrakar, visual artist Jayashree Chakravarty, social activist Sanajay Mitra, Kolkata tram conductor Prabir Kumar Goswami, designer Jogi Panghaal, architect & planner Aparna Das.

Mick prepares the invited Kolkatan artists for participation in tramjatra Melbourne. Mick designs & commissions “tramtactic” leather host/conductor bags made by Kolkata leather workers. Mick, together with CTC Manager-cum-Director Sudhir De and Mahadeb Shi, meet tram conductors. Prabir Kumar Goswami invited to Melbourne.

Calcutta group PUBLIC—People United for Better Living in Calcutta—include tramjatra in their 2002 calendar.
A wave of closure to tramways systems swept throughout the world in the 1960s fuelled by the booming oil and automotive industries. The private automobile gained international dominance as the most influential mode of transport shaping urban development. Things are slightly different now, as a renewed development of tramways, also called “light-rail”, has been occurring throughout the world since the 1990s. What drives this? The wheel of the tram turns, and returns, travelling with a different logic to a century of industrialised urban progress driven by “development” and “modernisation” with its associates “built-in-obsolescence”, “the individual” and “upward social mobility”. Was the tram ahead of its time? Does the tram make a different time—locating us in a condition that is less hierarchical, less one-way, and more fully connected within the social and ecological challenges around us?

Parallel lines cut cross each other, return upon themselves, and deliver us to points similar and different from where we start over again, and again. Settle in to the tram-ride as it makes time to by-pass the hasty speed of short-term trips in favour of an adventure through larger questions of urban mobility. This journey of the tram criss-crosses back and forth through cultural, technological and aesthetic juxtapositions. Project contributors move us through the two cities to encounter differing cultural values, skills, knowledges and orientations to the world. A familiar face might fleetingly appear for an instant in the window of a tram moving in an alternative direction. Opportunities for movement spring from encountering such arrangements of difference. Do we move forward? Tramjatra proceeds loosely along the path of the question: what happens when we utilise the way of the tram to imagine two cities and relations between them?

I’ve gathered together a diverse collection of core participants to create an interdisciplinary and inter-cultural micro-community of interest that includes tramways workers and management, creative practitioners (sculptors, filmmakers, painters, folk artists, designers and architects), social activists, scientists, engineers and business people. This community gathers together for one month in Kolkata and then again in Melbourne in 2001 to produce temporary public events throughout both cities. These included sculpture and painting, tram exhibitions and film screenings, public forums and readings, a daily column in a daily newspaper, technical reviews of tramways and of course tram conducting and street performance.

The project comes to facilitate fruitful interactions between government departments and ministers, tramways management and worker’s unions, NGO’s, media organisations and artists, demonstrating a form of globalisation based upon recognising and affirming a shared interest that is not motivated by commercial imperatives. Such alliances create new opportunities. A daily newspaper column titled tramjatra is written by a key project participant in the Kolkata Statesman over six weeks, opening up a popular media space to explore the issues and events of the project from a participant’s point of view whilst increasing public awareness of the project. In

---

5 The tramjatra project brought together an alliance of funding and in-kind support from Australian institutions (three government levels of arts funding, the regional state government’s Department of Infrastructure led by the Minister for Transport, the national government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and a university School of Architecture and Design) and Kolkata institutions (Calcutta Tramways Company, the state Minister for Transport, the tramways union, the Statesman newspaper, two advertising agencies, and NGO’s).

6 The column was written by Melbourne based writer/designer Suzie Attiwill over February and March of 2001.
Yarra Trams allow tram safety barrier yellow prows to be available for the project. Mick establishes the curatorial gesture of each artists’ temporary works being located by a prow at locations around the City Circle tram line.

The RMIT First Site Gallery acts as the project exhibition and depot-like hub, with RMIT Gateway House providing accommodation in central Melbourne.

Tramjatra Exhibition opened by Indian Consul Martin Joshi, City of Melbourne arts staff Alison Fraser and RMIT Professor Leon van Schaik.

Suzie & Jogi edit three editions produced over three weeks of a project single-broadsheet newspaper titled The Passenger, designed by Neal Haslem.

Yarra Trams & Victorian Department of Infrastructure deny request for use of City Circle Tram for the project unless a sponsorship fee is paid. A compromise is agreed allowing copies of The Passenger to be adhered to the exterior of one City Circle tram.

Roberto receives a fine for travelling on a tram without a ticket whilst randomly circulating the system with twin-trammi Prabir Kumar.

Forums convened including speakers Fazal Rizvi, Mary Kalantzis, Nikos Papatergiadis, Stuart Koop, Keith Butler, Malcolm Just, Gaby Bisy-Gunther, Andy Miller.

Bazaar auction of patua scrolls held on last day of exhibition, hosted by performance artist Neil Thomas.

Kevin Murray reviews Tramjatra in “tram ways”, The Age Saturday Extra newspaper, 3 Nov. 2001, p. 3

Victorian Greens Party campaign slogan: “we’ll put a conductor on every tram”.

Prof of Education at University of Chicago Fazal Rizvi (former Pro-Vice Chancellor of RMIT University) presents tramjatra project as a positive example of the potential of internationalised education at a conference in Canada.

Tramjatra book funded for print production from Australia Council for the Arts, City of Melbourne, RMIT University & Australia India Council.

Mick seeks content for a proposed tramjatra book from Kolkata collaborators, passengers and writers.

addition, over sixty daily newspaper reviews and numerous television reports cover the project in Kolkata. Less newspaper attention is attracted in Melbourne, but over a number of years is the subject of television reportage suggesting the project has played a key role in achieving the retention of Kolkata’s tramways. In 2001 the Mayor of Kolkata and the Minister for Transport in West Bengal are prompted to engage each other in debate in the Kolkata Telegraph daily newspaper on the subject of tramjatra and the future of tramways in the city.8

Years earlier in 1997 I wrote “our breath rises and falls with the way we move” in both English and translated Bengali above the heads of Calcutta tram passengers as part of the exhibition Calbourne installation tram. Emissions from industrialised modes of transport are often self-evident; air quality in an urban environment is often a matter of accessible everyday experience. Experts are supplying figures on the very high level of particulate matter in Calcutta’s air, the high statistics on asthma, the proportion of total carbon emissions produced by transportation and various modes of electric power generation in different societies (trams in both Calcutta and Melbourne are powered by brown-coal electricity generation systems). The impact of climate change is globally shared, yet the consequences are predicted to make low-lying delta areas of high population in West Bengal and Bangladesh most vulnerable. How can such issues be felt by non-experts and experts alike?

To coincide with launching a book of the project in 2005, I organise an action to change the Calcutta tram conductors uniform for one day. After negotiations with tramways management, union and State Government, three-hundred sky-blue shirts are offered to conductors, featuring a printed image on the shirt chest of a lung, with one lobe loosely resembling a map of Calcutta’s tram network map and the other lobe resembling Melbourne’s tram network. The action is called Shared Lung. Beyond the individual body, breath provides a meter of rhythm and life-force in its alternations and interdependent balancing of expansion and contraction.

---

Mick presents academic paper on tramjatra “Imagining transports of sustainability” at International Conference of the Humanities on Rhodes Island (Greece) and meets Gayatri Spivak in audience.

Mick commissions content and edits tramjatra book collaborating closely with Neal Haslem on its layout and design.

Mick paints shared lung image.

Mick commissions Tomorrow Foundation, Kolkata NGO working with slum-dwelling children, to produce 300 shared lung uniform shirts.

Mick, Roberto & Neal travel to Kolkata. A succession of meetings in one morning with tram conductor union delegate Probir Kumar Goswami, Tramways Union General Secretary Mr Dasgupta, Calcutta Tramways Company Chairman Shri Rajdeo Goala and Calcutta Tramways Company Manager Mr Pal, West Bengal Minister of Transport & Sport Shri Subhas Chakraborty secure support and permission to undertake shared lung action.

Tramjatra book privately launched on 8 September at Calcutta Club by Dr Nabneeta Dev Sen and Mr Buddhadeb Guha. Sujata Basu and daughter perform a tram folksong; Sanjay Mitra performs a book reading.

Shared Lung action begins on 9 September with Calcutta Tramways Company conductors wearing a change of uniform.

Tramjatra book publicly launched on a purpose built stage on 10 September at Esplanade Tram Terminus by West Bengal Minister of Transport & Sport Shri Subhas Chakraborty, Calcutta Tramways Company Chairman Shri Rajdeo Goala, Tramways Union General Secretary Mr Dasgupta. Patuas Sarna & Dukhushyam Chitrakar perform a pat, Sanjay Mitra performs a book reading.

Mick presents guest lecture Tracking Tramjatra at SARAI Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi.

MOMENTUM

The tram, like the bicycle, a mode of transport currently enjoying a revival more than a century after its invention, carries into the contemporary post-industrial condition something of its genesis at the intersection of pre-industrial and early industrial times. The tram is a medium that moves with this attachment to multiple eras, hybrid temporalities and variable speeds. The tramjatra project has similarly acquired a hybrid tempo over a decade across two continents, characterised by slow dialogue, periods of pause, intense interaction, doubling back and reiteration.

Tramways are a medium of social, civic and environmental relations, and hence are also a medium of artistic possibility. Through the tramjatra project I have sought to open up dialogue by situating elements and actors in relations of movement within a network. This is, for me, about the inter-connected relations of a network: the net-effect is to gather together and maintain dynamism in this project network that operates through the medium of tramways. This tramjatra network has enabled boundaries to be opened up, facilitating the mutual engagement of different interest groups and different concerns: the pragmatism of tramways service provision brought to engage with the poetics of art in the public domain; concern with the urban condition of “the worlds most liveable city” brought to engage with concerns of one of the most challenging unplanned urban environments; the interests of government management of urban infrastructure brought to engage with the interests of the public commuter on the street; and the interests of tram conductors brought to engage with the interests of artists. Through layering numerous dimensions of inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary encounter and exchange, the tramjatra project attempts to place fixed cultural distinctions and understandings under question.

The tramjatra book is conceived as an active element of the project and not simply a representation of it. In 2009 I gathered the project founding friends to “trace tramjatra” by walking the tram tracks of both cities, commencing firstly in Melbourne with a stick-device to drag copies of the book through the groove of the tram tracks as we walked. The structure of the tramjatra book bears repeating here to have us again inhabit the momentum of a modus operandi:

DEPARTING visits the impulses and ideas from which a tramjatra has gained initial momentum, and so offers preliminary thoughts to accompany your travel. TRACKING takes us amongst tram conductors, artists, social activists and designers in the tracks of tramjatra events held in 2001. Further connections to people and ideas are encountered in the NETWORKING section, where emerging writers and renowned scholars lead us through Melbourne or Kolkata with considerations on the nature of public transport and issues of urban mobility and politics, community and culture, public art, education and learning, development and globalisation, poetics and tramways, and the role of imagination and memory. The lines of thought found in the scholarly chapters of this section are tensioned between the clatter of multiple voices in the chapters at either end. The section
Tramjatra book launched on 9th April at Trades Hall by Yarra Trans CEO Denis Cliché & RMIT academic Soumitri Varadarajan, VCA Head of Spatial Practice Marie Sierra, the Connees performance troupe and the Melbourne Tramways Band.

Fiona Capp reviews Tramjatra book in The Age newspaper as “pick of the week”, 29 April 2006.


Mick makes book clamping device for dragging tramjatra book through tram tracks, to become a tool for “tracing tramjatra”.

Mick & Roberto walk and talk East Brunswick to city GPO tram route in Tracing Tramjatra night walk night talk action midnight to 4am.

Minhazz Majumdar coordinates three Indian artisans including Mantu Chitrakar, patua of Naya village who participated in first commissions of tramjatra, to travel to Melbourne as part of her “Crosshatched” arts exchange project in April, supported by Australia-India Council of Australian Department of Foreign Affairs.


Mick travels to Kolkata, meets with patuas to their discuss moneys earned from the 2001 Melbourne tramjatra bazaar that is still held in trust by Mick, and discusses possible future collaboration with Probir Guha of Alternative Living Theatre.

Mick travels to Kolkata and again meets with patuas to discuss them self-organising to handle the moneys earned from the 2001 Melbourne tramjatra bazaar that is still held in trust by Mick.

Mick, Debasish, Jayanta & Mahadeb walk and talk the currently closed Kiddepore to Esplanade tram route in Tracing Tramjatra dawn walk dawn talk action 6am to 9am.

Mick presents academic paper “Tracing Tramjatra: toward participatory aesthetic politics” at the conference of the Indian Association for the Study of Australia.

Sagar Dan critiques patua participation in Tramjatra at same conference.

Mick, Mahadeb, Aparna Das, Soumitra Das, Sagar Dan & friend walk and talk College St, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road tram route in Tracing Tramjatra night walk night talk action 11am to 3am.

opens up with a diverse collection of short writings by “passengers” who have already been transported by their encounter with tramjatra, and draws toward future considerations at the other end, through artists’ and designers’ speculative ideas intended to provoke consideration of the unrealised potential value of tramways. And just as all tramways systems have a place to gather, rest and share resources, the SHEDDING section is where you will find miscellaneous information on tramways, tramjatra and this book’s contents.
Clockwise from top (1, 2, 4) Calbourne tram installation, Mick Douglas, Calcutta 1997; (3, 5) Melcutta tram installation, Mick Douglas, Melbourne 1997; (activities prior to commencing this academic research); photos Mick Douglas.
maps, installation view, Jayashree Chakravarty, tramjatra Kolkata 2001, photo Jogi Panghaal.
Clockwise from top (1) Roberto D’Andrea conducting, tramjatra Kolkata 2001, photo Mahadeb Shi; (2, 3, 4) tramjatra Kolkata tram, details views, Suzie Attiwill and Jogi Panghaal, tramjatra Kolkata 2001, photos Jogi Panghaal; (5) tramjatra column by Suzie Attiwill, appeared daily in The Statesman newspaper, Kolkata, over six weeks during tramjatra Kolkata 2001, photo Mick Douglas.
jorano pat, installation view of enlarged scroll painting, Sarna Chitrakar, tramjatra Kolkata 2001, photo Jogi Panghaal.
Clockwise from top left (1,2,4,5) twin trammmies Roberto D’Andrea and Prabir Kumar Goswami during tram prow performances and conducting, tramjatra Melbourne 2001, photos Sanjay Mitra; (3) double prow intervention installation, Mick Douglas, tramjatra Melbourne 2001, photo Mick Douglas.
Top (1) tramjatra book at its distributors office, Kolkata 2005; bottom (2) shared lung performance intervention, gaining support of (left to right) the Managing Director and the Chairman of Calcutta Tramways Company are Robert D’Andrea, Neal Haslem and Mick Douglas, Kolkata 2005, auto-photo Mick Douglas.
tracing tramjatra night walks night talks, clockwise from top left (1,2,5) Mick Douglas with tramjatra friends, Kolkata 2009; (3,4,6) Mick Douglas with Roberto D’Andrea, Melbourne 2009.
two cities
two tracks from a shared colonial past
two tramways
two lines of steel
what comes around

goes around
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey Title:</th>
<th>RIDE-ON-DINNER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carriage:</td>
<td>transporting cultural transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOURNEY TYPE:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration:</td>
<td>2006—ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive:</td>
<td>conviviality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Social Concerns: | Self-authorising generosity.  
Feeding a human-powered transport system.  
Pedalling a local food system.  
Cultivating a gastronome of urban metabolism.  
Sharing responsibility and making social power. |
| Mode Of Mobility: | pedalogical |
| JOURNEY ELEMENTS: | |
| Infrastructure: | Mode of Transport: cycling |
| Tools: | helmets, napkins, tickets, improvised percussion devices, local organic food, recipe. |
| Social Relations: | Carriage Artist: Mick Douglas |
| Role: | concept, vehicle & tool design, collective facilitator, happiness host. |
| Social model: | gift economy |
| Social distribution: | A: Cultural Transports Collective as hosts (currently 7 individuals).  
B: co-hosting organisation or group.  
C: DIY enthusiasts.  
D: cycling participants.  
E: street public. |
| Institutional Power Players: | RMIT University  
Architects for Peace  
Craft Victoria  
West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial |
| Tactics: | informing, gesturing, demonstrating.  
cultivating, mobilising, swarming.  
situating, socialising, stimulating.  
embodying, aestheticising, metabolising. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>JOURNEY DOCUMENTATION:</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Archive:</strong></td>
<td><strong><a href="http://www.ride-on-dinner.net">www.ride-on-dinner.net</a></strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official Journey Documents:</strong></td>
<td>Mick Douglas, <em>ride-on-dinner DIY recipe #1</em>, 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Video:**                  | *ride-on-dinner #5*, Mick Douglas, 8mins, 2009.  
| **Associated Publications:**| Mick Douglas, “Other Ways With Wheels”, *Thinking on Two Wheels Cycling Conference proceedings 2007*, University of South Australia. |
1978

A raw chicken egg thrown from a passing bus hits Mick Douglas in the head when cycling the 8km commuting journey home from high school.

2003

A vegetarian and pescetarian diet opens up for Mick.
Imagine getting a 10 minute open-air ride across the central city on a pedicab to get to that meeting; or hiring a trailer for your bike from the corner store when you need to move your stuff or carry a big load of shopping; or picking up a fresh crepe and strawberries from a chef-on-a-bike who is at just the right place at just the right time; or getting your bike repaired by a mechanic who rides her workshop-on-wheels to your home. There is a broad range of existing and new services that can be fulfilled in more sustainable and enjoyable ways by pedal power.

That is how I pitched a Pedal-Powered Vehicles Workshop to prospective design student and community participants in January 2006. The imaginings offered are not without precedents. Indeed such services (except for regular pedicabs) are more-or-less attainable in the Melbourne of 2010. The workshop intended to focus on practical designing and building prototypes of pedal-powered vehicles. By hosting a series of associated forums and public lectures, the workshop process shared its exploration and outcomes with the broader local community of sustainable transport stakeholders. The emphasis of the workshop was to learn through making, to produce vehicles that can advocate and demonstrate pedal-powered possibilities, to connect potential developers and users of pedal-power and build peer-to-peer relationships that may seed entrepreneurial opportunities and community benefits. An international team was assembled for the workshop, including Indian designer Shreya Gadepalli, whose improvements to rickshaws in India and becaks in Indonesia are making big changes to the lives of thousands of people; New York based Matteo Martignoni, whose pedal-powered vehicle design experience includes aerodynamic land speed record vehicles and amphibious vehicles; and myself as convener and host, or as I described myself for the Workshop, as a Cultural Transports artist; and Ceri Hann, artist and Workshop technician. Having previously convened sustainable transport stakeholder forums as part of my work on public bicycle systems, I wished to utilise this Workshop as an opportunity to explore the dynamics of a social network around cycling in ways that might reveal more of the poetics of pedal-powered mobility. Workshop participants were drawn from community enthusiasts and undergraduate design students.

With over a decade of tramways-based arts projects behind me, I wished to extend my practice to explore another mode of transport for its contemporary potential as a medium of arts enquiry, also one that I have regularly practiced in everyday life. My practice was evolving to work in networked ways: organising and hosting assemblages of people who experience some intensity of co-presence together via ephemeral events. I was beginning to place increasing emphasis upon

---

1 Shreya Gadepalli is a staff member and Matteo Martignoni a board member of The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (http://www.itdp.org/) with whom my RMIT colleague Soumitri Varadarajan had previously worked.

2 This work was undertaken through my supervision of Ban Hsi Liu, Master of Design student at RMIT University, undertaking the design research project “Scenarios for the public bicycle in Melbourne” completed in 2005, and 1st Prize winner of Bicycle Victoria Research Award in 2006.
2004

Australian cook, restaurateur and food writer Stephanie Alexander establishes the Kitchen Garden Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to introducing Kitchen Gardens into primary schools.

2005

Ban Hsi Liu, Master of Design student at RMIT University under the pedalling supervision of Mick Douglas, completes design research project “Scenarios for the public bicycle in Melbourne” with a public stakeholder forum. The project is awarded 1st Prize Bicycle Victoria Research Award 2006.
fostering moments of collectivity by hosting experiences of food and rejuvenation as a part of the dynamics of projects and learning experiences. Numerous experiments with food were accruing, including cooking during my delivery of a practice-based academic research presentation in 2002 to explore allegorical poetic structures, and running a series of design courses investigating food systems that had students cooking in their design studio. The actual and symbolic power of food was coming to the boil for me.

Two types of creative actions stood as reference points for my practice. Firstly, the well publicised installation/event works of Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija since the 1990s involving cooking free “pad thai” noodles within the contemporary art gallery context for gallery audiences, sometimes involving the cooking equipment carried on a standard bicycle. Tiravanija’s work, persistently promoted by Nicolas Bourriaud3 as exemplary of relational aesthetics, focuses upon the participatory relation of audiences to experiencing artworks, but it does so firmly within the discursive and formal frameworks of gallery-based contemporary art as a challenge to the object-based commodified value of art. The second reference point was an annual action outside of, and irreverent to, the frame of art. On a remote wilderness walking trail of southwest Tasmania, two environmental activists set up their “Peripatetic Pancakes” stall offering free pancakes to fellow bushwalkers in exchange for a story.4

MOMENT OF DEPARTURE

When hosting three weeks of an intensive workshop project involving international guests, students and grass-roots community activists, I advocate a need for a form of collective culmination. One way or another, participants consciously and unconsciously make ways of configuring their experiences into patterns, relations and forms. In taking a role of convener and host, I attempt to offer key experiential ways that afford the formation of knowledge-producing configuration of intense feeling and thought via which the workshop may later resonate. Prior to the Workshop commencing I articulated a loose idea of a “ride-on-dinner” as the culminating Workshop experience. A pedal-powered load-carrying vehicle that could act as a portable kitchen was specified as one of the Workshop projects. Designing and constructing such a vehicle was not of major concern to me, as it was clearly achievable. I yearned for a key gesture that would afford a logic, experiential integrity, a sense of legibility and a tenor of wisdom to the occasion of people gathered in mobile assemblage. I aspired for simple aesthetic clarity in gestural lightness; to an economy of material usage and embodied energy born out of the dependency upon human power; and a quality of surprise in making use of given conditions in unpremeditated ways. An upturned bicycle helmet presented itself as a potential eating vessel. My experimentation with folded paper to make an inner lining for the helmet proved it adequately practical.

“Pedal-Powered Vehicles Workshop” is conceived and hosted by Mick from RMIT School of Architecture & Design. The community-based 3-week workshop course is pedaled by international collaborators Shreya Gadepalli, Designer and Technical Director with the Institute for Transportation & Development Policy based in India, and Matteo Martignoni, a bicycle industry consultant and Vice President of the International Human Powered Vehicle Association based in New York, assisted by Ceri Hann, artist & technician of Public Art Program at RMIT. The Workshop includes trial of local manufactured recumbent cycles, stakeholder forums, public lectures, designing and prototyping bicycle trailers and load-bikes and an exhibition at the Sustainable Living Festival in Melbourne’s Federation Square. Participant Luca Abate edits a 12-minute short film titled “Pedal-Powered Vehicles Workshop”. A team of participants design and make the first prototype “Kitchen Vehicle”. Workshop participant Kate Archdeacon, a qualified chef and design student, enthusiastically greets Mick’s idea for a ride-on-dinner. Mick proposes eating out of bike-helmets. Kate and Mick lead cooking preparations to culminate the Workshops with a ride that tests the new vehicle prototypes: the inaugural ride-on-dinner.
simple gesture seeded a motive and potential modus operandi for a *ride-on-dinner*. The cyclist separates their helmet from the conventional contents that it is intended to protect—the head, brain, memory and imagination, certain knowledge and ideas—to assume a posture of humility. Two hands holding an empty vessel reach out in openness.

**MOVEMENT**

Grab your cycle and an appetite for the spice of life to join a swarm of cyclists served a three-course vegetarian meal, pausing in three different locations over a three-hour evening inner-city ride. Eighty people gather in the early evening in a public location in response to the informal open email invitation distributed only five days earlier for the *ride-on-dinner*. A mix of people assemble: some are in association with the larger exhibition, conference or social event that *ride-on-dinner* is participating in. Others are present with an interest in the arts, transportation, urban interventions, sustainability or human-powered-vehicles.

A sense of delight is palpable as the swarm rolls into motion. Conversation drifts in and out of focus. Awareness ebbs and flows with the changing particularities of geographic territories passed through. There is a palpable sense of human agency given pleasurable leverage in this social setting of mobile, shared experience. The uncertainty of direction of movement gives rise to a perpetually provisional, unstated collective agreement. People are along for the ride. Yet, like nomads, people follow food. The largest vehicle and most unusual cycle trailers are, by inference, the facilities that provide the food, and so they give focus for the eyes to see and the stomach to follow. The first course reaches the base of the oesophagus as the swarm journeys through the urban environment via routes less commonly explored. Elements of a project begin to stack up.

A Friday or Saturday evening, commonly designated for leisure and entertainment, is opportunity for people to participate in an unknown venture. Suspense builds as a crowd of cyclists gathers, waits and so shares in the making of time together. The experience has already begun, yet the ritualised marking of “beginning” is a ploy willingly participated in. It tells us we are departing; that we can leave something behind and surrender to not-knowing where we may go. Upon invitation of a man wearing a bicycle helmet and an apron, you push your bicycle through a constricted space—a narrow gateway of a parkland path, or the exhibition space of white cube art gallery, or the kitchen of a domestic residence. You are greeted and willingly accept a simple, personable gesture of acknowledgment—we all know it’s a construct, but we are all the more willing to play along if it catches our wit. I improvise words that gently probe and rattle your sense of self-esteem, situating you to acknowledge something of your self whilst I demonstrate myself to be attentively engaged with you here and now with openness. A connection is felt between us in this momentary encounter. I tie a red cloth napkin around your neck. You know that you are now marked. You are collected and part of a collective something that is yet to be known. You are what you want to
ride-on-dinner (1)
6pm Friday 17 February 2006, Canning St
northern end of Carlton Gardens
presented as part of PEDAL POWERED
VEHICLES WORKSHOP
http://pedalpw.blogspot.com

Food is vegetarian made from local organic produce offered
on a pay-as-you-feel basis.

summer menu for 80
entrée of middle eastern bagels with olive oil and dukkah
main course of Morrocan seven vegetable tagine served with
couscous, yoghurt and harissa
desert of chocolate brownies, local Turkish delight and nuts
drinks: byo!

Pedalled by Mick Douglas, Kate Archdeacon, Ceri Hann and
anyone who wants to.

ride-on-dinner (2)
5.30pm Friday 12 May 2006, Canning St
northern end of Carlton Gardens
presented as an end of Autumn celebration

Food is vegetarian made from local organic produce offered
on a pay-as-you-feel basis.

winter menu for 80
entrée of salt and pepper popcorn
main course of red bean, spinach, lentil & rice kitcheree
desert of chocolate brownies
drinks: byo!

Pedalled by Mick Douglas, Kate Archdeacon, Ceri Hann and
anyone who wants to.

Marie Sierra writes “Public Transport and
Pedalling as Public Art: The Work of Mick
Douglas”, Thinking the Future: Art, Design and
Creativity: ACUADS 2006 Conference,
theo_crit.htm>
make of yourself here. You are not alone.

The season and the location at which we cyclists assemble suggest the first tastes of the occasion. A dank laneway between multi-story buildings of the central city in early spring inspires locally-grown sautéed mushrooms to be served on provisionally propped cardboard platters. A late summer’s passing through the kitchen of a domestic residence (in a lower-middle-class inner-city suburb of 1950s southern European migrants) has a spoonful of tomato sugo offered to you by the cook of the house from the pot on the stove. The broader social interests of re-localisation, slow-food, and sustainable consumption are tangibly performed as you move through a range of simple food-based experiences. Culinary value is removed from settings of domestic family nourishment or the frames of a professionalised commercial hospitality to unfold here in a whole-of-environment aesthetic experience.

Along quiet routes of existing off-road cycle paths the riders are at ease, familiar with the scale of infrastructure along which they can comfortably ride at leisure. When venturing along key streets through hospitality industry precincts, riders become self-conscious of their role as performers as if in a parade, provoking interaction with street-side on-lookers. A tour of the urban environment where one flows with the collective direction of the swarm allows one to gain a perceptiveness of the extra-ordinary amongst the ordinary. We pause for a main-meal in the undercover protection of a bicycle/pedestrian path tunnel underneath a major inner city road; or on a terrace-paved riverside location opposite the most highly priced real estate. The city becomes ours to appropriate, to lightly live-with in ways informal and unintended.

Each further ride-on-dinner provides opportunity to develop additional gestures, explore potential layers of resonance and extend the opportunity for others to join in exploring the potential of this form of event-based action. Multiple layers of interconnected relations emerge: of scale (body / social group / city); of bodily metabolic experience (food energy input / body expended energy output); of implicit embodied energy (embodied in the food to be eaten / in vehicles of transport / in urban infrastructure); of passage (of food through the body / riders through the city); of circular perception patterning (of the body’s metabolism / of the city’s cyclical functions / of global climate).

MOMENTUM

One of the greatest pleasures of pedal-powered transport is the experience of not pedaling and rolling with freewheeling momentum. A style of riding that seeks energy-efficiency will weave an alternating rhythm between the propulsion produced by human-pedaling energy and the propulsion produced by the interplay of landform variation and consequent gravitational pull, wind conditions and kinetic energy. The ride-on-dinner project has evolved through a practice of minimising the pedaling and maximising the interplay of forces and the spin-off effects.

The first ride-on-dinner commenced with a group of three core hosts: Kate Archdeacon, Ceri Hann and myself. Like a slow, everyday exploration of appetite and
2007

Mick Douglas writes “Other Ways With Wheels”, Thinking on Two Wheels Cycling Conference proceedings 2007, University of South Australia. Kate, Ceri and Mick take bikes to Adelaide to attend the conference, with Kate presenting reflections on the Pedal Powered Vehicles Workshop.

Mick Douglas & Ramesh Ayyar teach “Video Grit” course, and Mick Douglas teaches “Travel Tracks” course run at RMIT School of Architecture & Design—both courses exploring relations between moving image, moving camera and urban movement experience.


Mick Douglas & Ramesh Ayyar & students exhibit “Motion Grit” video in “bespoke” (art exhibition of the Bicycle Film Festival), Mori Gallery, Sydney.
taste, the project has loosely evolved without any expectations of ends or purposes but by responding to opportunities presented and the variance of our desires and availabilities. A core group of seven hosts\(^5\) now share a sense of ownership and desire for the project. I situate myself to stimulate the desires of others by sharing my desire in ways that attempt to elucidate focus, potentiality and momentum for our collaborative production. I offer a platform of stimulus to provoke, support and keep our individual and collective interests moving and engaging. I offer the group title “Cultural Transports Collective” as both a practical philosophy of collectivity for our working relations—amongst ourselves and amongst those who join us on a ride-on-dinner—and as a symbolic statement of concerns that may provoke curiosity toward the gathering force of the project.

For the Collective, the ride-on-dinner provides us with a means to explore poetic interconnections between cycling cultures, uses of urban environments and the production of socially situated wandering knowledges; as well as relationships between practices of hospitality and forms of being together that challenge the sustainability of lifestyles. We undertake such exploration though sharing interest in the potential for a participative art of the public domain. Rather than attempt to provide purposeful ends for concerns of sustainable mobility and sustainable consumption, the project seeks to provide inspiration for surprising, accessible, curious and pleasurable responses to these contemporary challenges.

The first five ride-on-dinner events are undertaken in collaboration with a partnering group with interests in the arts, transport, food or sustainability. The Collective rides up and joins alongside to offer the ride-on-dinner as an act of hospitality. In the Collective, and amongst the participatory swarm, I am situated in the middle, with demonstrative agency and a response-ability. I manifest this in a relational language of gestures creating participatory artistic opportunities, rather than in the more conventional artistic predetermination of directions. Key aesthetic gestures give leverage to these opportunities: the performative capacity of a pedal-powered vehicle to facilitate large group-scaled food production and consumption; the transformation of cyclists’ helmets to mobile eating vessels; the ritual greeting and offering of a red napkin or apron to situate riders in ambiguous roles of guest/host; the appearance of key hosts in idiosyncratically decorated bicycle helmets of their making; the collective construction of food menus relative to local food production, and riding routes relative to motion-based locality knowledge; the overlay of culinary sensations of food and spatio-temporal sensations of ephemeral urban inhabitation; the rituals of the collective group meeting over food to discuss future or past ride-on-dinners.

The cultural climate in Melbourne and throughout Australia has shifted since the first ride-on-dinner in 2006. Participation in cycling is rapidly spiraling; bicycle sales are outnumbering car sales year after year; slow-food, organic farmers markets and urban back-yard vegetable gardens are gaining community interest and are on the rise. After the fifth ride-on-dinner event, it is as though I am desiring a change in cooking and eating and so is the Collective. I feel clear that the current

\(^5\) The Cultural Transports Collective at July 2010 includes Kate Archdeacon, Mick Douglas, Rob Eales, Anthony Hamilton Smith, Ceri Hann, Neal Haslem, Ben Landau and Lynda Roberts.
Mick Douglas teaches “Change Vehicle” design course run at RMIT School of Architecture & Design, collaborating with pedal vehicle manufacturer Ben Goodall of Trisled, producing the second prototype load bike named the “Change Vehicle”.

ride-on-dinner (3)
first to roll up first for dinner
5.30pm Saturday 1 September 2007, O’Grady Place, Carlton
presented as part of TRANSPORTED forum: collective transport sustainable cities, hosted by Architects for Peace with RMIT Public Art Unit <www.architectsforpeace.com>

Food is vegetarian made from local organic produce offered on a pay-as-you-feel basis.

spring menu for 80
entrée of salt and pepper popcorn
main course of fresh artichoke, fennel & chickpea bouillabaisse with couscous and red pepper rouille
desert of pear and apple poached in port
drinks: sweet peppermint tea

Pedalled by Mick Douglas, Kate Archdeacon, Ceri Hann, Neil Thomas and anyone who wants to.
operational model for the project is off my menu. I decline numerous invitations to host another *ride-on-dinner*. The Collective and I have not initiated any of the imagined and discussed possible developments of the project. It is not a priority for me. In mid 2010 a Sydney-based group discuss hosting a *ride-on-dinner* with one of the more recently joined members of the Collective. I’m provoked and enlivened again by the desire of others. I convene a Collective discussion. A tension arises between the informal nature of the *ride-on-dinner* ethos to date, and a perceived necessity by the Sydney host organisation to formalise their offering a *ride-on-dinner*. How do we enable others to do their own *ride-on-dinners*? I adopt the format of the *recipe* as a way to transmit the know-how that has been accrued, whilst allowing the self-appointed “host” and “cook” to do as they please.

---

6 Anthony Hamilton-Smith joined the Collective in mid 2008 as a chef and 4th year Interior Design Student who was mid-way through designing and making a bicycle trailer-kitchen to expand experiences of slow-food for his graduation project. His trailer was subsequently exhibited at Object Gallery, Sydney, whose staff encouraged him to offer a *ride-on-dinner*. 
Pedal-Powered Vehicles Workshop” video is exhibited at “Axis Bold As Love”, video salon by A Constructed World, Le CAPC musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux

Mick Douglas performs “Metaphoral”—a transportation service action utilising the Change Vehicle for Robyn Healy’s “Nomadic Archive”, part of AN URBAN INTERIOR OCCUPATION, Craft Victoria, 9 to 20 September, 2008.

RMIT interior design student and chef Anthony Hamilton Smith is developing a slow-food kitchen bicycle trailer for his graduation major project and is introduced to Mick. Anthony enthusiastically joins with the ride-on-dinner hosting group. Mick starts referring to the group as the Cultural Transports Collective.

Neal Haslem develops a website for the project at www.ride-on-dinner.net

ride-on-dinner (4)
first to roll up first for dinner
5.30pm Friday 12 September 2008, Craft Victoria, 31 Flinders Lane
presented as part of AN URBAN INTERIOR OCCUPATION, Craft Victoria, 9 to 20 September, 2008. <www.urbaninterior.net>

Food is vegetarian made from local organic produce offered on a pay-as-you-feel basis.

spring menu for 80
entée of mushrooms sautéed in sherry vinegar with garlic and parsley
main course of smokey pumpkin and kale stew with potato and sweet potato mash
desert of seasonal apples with rice-flake crumble topping
drinks: sweet fresh lemon and saffron tea

Pedalled by Cultural Transports Collective: Kate Archdeacon, Mick Douglas, Anthony Hamilton Smith, Ceri Hann Neal Haslem, Lynda Roberts—amongst miscellaneous peddlers including artists, chefs, transport industry workers, performers, children, academics, good-for-nothings and you. www.ride-on-dinner.net
ride-on-dinner … DIY recipe #1
Cultural Transports Collective, 2010

Do you have an adventurous appetite for the aesthetic qualities of urban life and a curiosity about food, transport and human power systems? This recipe will make an urban meal adventure to pedal amongst friends and strangers. Makes a surprising experience of the human body, a social body of cyclists, and the body of a city. Provides food for thought for participants and unsuspecting audiences. Vary the recipe as you feel.

PREPARATION
A ride-on-dinner is best enjoyed when the makers pedal the potential pleasures of open, informal and self-organising ways of urban living. You might wish to practice...

1. self-authorising generosity
   Your desire and the hunger of fellow riders is all that is needed. You will be part of a temporary swarm of individuals each taking responsibility for your own actions. Ring your bell as you freewheel past centralised authorities and concerns with permissions and permits. Join the gift economy. Give what you want to give.

2. feeding a human-powered transport system
   Explore your local environment for unique experiences by bike. Look for stimulating locations to pass through and savour, or to appropriate by pausing for a chance happening. Identify both a good-weather route and a bad-weather route that are a gentle pedal. Plan to pass through some busy streetscapes where the sight of the cycling swarm will give food for thought about human-powered ways.

3. pedalling a local food system
   Get to know the local urban food production scene or grow your own food. Identify quality fresh seasonal produce that can be the basis of your menu. A vegan menu passes most people’s dietary requirements. Can you source your menu ingredients from produce grown within a bike-ride distance of your dinner route?

4. cultivating a gastronome of urban metabolism
   Notice the rhythms and patterns of the local urban environment at different times and days in the season. Identify potential interesting co-incidents that the ride-on-dinner might have with other events in the cycle of city life. Imagine the taste of particular foods ingested in particular urban settings. Savour the aesthetic pleasures of simple food and simply riding. Carry things light in weight and relish all that is light in spirit.

5. sharing responsibility and making social power
   The difference between a picnic-by-bike and your ride-on-dinner is that you are gathering social power. Celebrate that you are not in control. You are leading people to food. Personally invite key interesting people. Roll out the word of ride-on-dinner to different social networks that do not normally mix. Everyone is a pedlar: make non-hierarchical conditions and open informality where everyone can mix with everyone. Liberate yourself from the constraints of dinner bookings. Let people change their mind, follow their feeling, get the taste of things to come, ride together and drift apart. Relax knowing that the cycling swarm will dissipate and move-on by its own accord if ever in danger.
2009

The Victorian Government announces intention to seek tenders to deliver a public bicycle system for Melbourne, inspired by the advertising revenue based systems in France.

Mick meets Ronald Haverman, founder of Dutch share bike system OV Fliets temporarily resident in Melbourne, and convenes a design studio at RMIT University for him to lead with tutor Ben Landau on share bikes. Students prototype a low-infrastructure local-business distributed system called “Common Bike”, generating extensive local publicity, with the aim of influencing the government tender process and commercial responses.

Competitive television cooking game show MasterChef Australia, based on the original British version, commences broadcast and popularises food discussion in Australia.

Mick hosts a Melbourne Share Bike Forum with government, NGO’s, commercial stakeholders and students on 15th June to review and share insights from the “Common Bike” scheme that is stated will not be furthered as commercial tender.
INGREDIENTS
Vary ingredients to match the resources you have available with the number of people you hope to have to dinner. Ingredients listed here are based upon a ride-on-dinner for 80 people.

1. Hosts
   2 happiness hosts, 2 food hosts, 1 lube-boy host, 1 videoing host

2. Cyclists
   each dinner cyclist with their own bike, helmet, jacket and lights.
   4 cyclists experienced in group rides to shepherd the swarm through tricky situations (1 per 20 cyclists).

3. Location to Meet
   with two adjoined areas linked by a natural threshold or “line”.
   that accommodates cyclists gathering in the most open and visible area.
   that allows cyclists to be greeted at the threshold “line” by the happiness hosts to receive their dinner napkin before passing through to the other area for first course.
   (nearby water and toilets is good!)

4. Food menu
   simply inspired by fresh locally-grown organic seasonal produce.
   planned to be pre-prepared and require minimal cooking on the ride.
   10-50grams per person for tastings.
   250-300grams per person for main meals.

5. Routes
   good weather route 3-12km.
   bad weather route 3-10km.
   (plan access to toilet stops and water on the route!)

6. Pedal powered vehicles
   1 load carrying vehicle for 60kg food + cooking equipment.
   1 load-carrying vehicle or trailer for 20kg equipment.
   2 load carrying cycles/trailers/panniers for 5-10kg support equipment.

7. Equipment
   1 red-cloth neck-napkin for each rider (printed with this recipe!)
   2 large gas burners & bottles.
   2 large pots.
   20Lt water drum (check water available on route).
   2 pop-up wire coil rubbish bins and lining bags.
   broadsheet newspaper and greaseproof paper for helmet liner (2sheets newspaper and 500x500mm greaseproof paper per helmet).
   dinner lighting (white paper bags to go over bike lights).
   cutlery and cups to suit (bamboo are now a good available option).
   food preparation equipment to suit your menu (boards, knives, strainers, buckets).
   6 head-mounted torches / bike-lights for hosts.
   video camera.
ride-on-dinner (5)
first to roll up first for dinner
5.30pm Saturday 28 March,
135 Union Street Brunswick
presented as part of
wEST BRUNSWICK SCULPTURE TRIENNIAL

Food is vegetarian made from local organic produce
offered on a pay-as-you-feel basis.

autumn taster menu for 80

- taste 1 of tomato sugo
  (at West Brunswick domestic kitchen)
- taste 2 of fried saganaki cheese & spiced kalamata olives
  (at West Brunswick domestic back yard)
- taste 3 of salt & pepper popcorn
  (at Temple Park—neighbourhood park)
- taste 4 of pickled cauliflower
  (at Essendon Community Gardens)
- taste 5 of coriander detox
  (at Mooney Ponds Creek / CityLink Tollway water catchment)
- taste 6 of local Turkish delight
  (at pedestrian / cyclist bridge over CityLink Tollway / Mooney Ponds Creek before climbing hill)
- taste 7 of homegrown basil pesto on crispbread
  (offered by Alex Rizalka & Julie Davies their kerb side beside Ocular Lab)
- taste 8 of smoked paprika roasted almonds
  (at Brickworks housing development)
- main meal of mushroom risotto with fennel salad
- drinks: with fresh herb waters & beer

Pedalled by Cultural Transports Collective: Kate Archdeacon, Mick Douglas, Anthony Hamilton Smith, Ceri Hann, Neal Haslem, Lynda Roberts—amongst miscellaneous peddlers including artists, chefs, transport industry workers, performers, children, academics, good-for-nothings and you.

www.ride-on-dinner.net

Past ride-on-dinner attendees Ronald Haverman and Wim Hafkamp (both visiting Dutch academic collaborators with Mick) state intentions to initiate ride-on-dinners in Netherlands.
8. **Co-incidence**
   weather and natural phenomena.
   urban patterns choreographed by infrastructure.
   other planned urban events and spontaneous occurrences.

9. **Surprise**
   the unexpected happening.
   the collective swarm producing affects greater than the sum of its individuals.

10. **Documentation**
    video camera able to be hand-held, bike-mounted and/or helmet mounted.
    www.ride-on-dinner.net online archive.

**METHOD**
Vary method to explore opportunities available and tastes of interest.

1. **reconnaissance ride**
   Hosts ride the proposed routes at exactly the intended time one-week before the ride-on-dinner. Rehearse the loose choreography of experiencing locations and timings of your adventure menu. Identify what needs to change or could change for the better.

2. **invitation**
   One week’s notice for dinner is a good balance between creating curious expectation and setting-up dreaded predictability. For example, simply invite to:
   ride-on-dinner
   (meeting time; date; location)
   Join a swarm of cyclists for an urban meal adventure.
   First to roll up, first for dinner.
   No matter the weather, just roll up with your bike, helmet, lights and a jacket. Food is good quality vegetarian made from local organic produce offered on a donate-as-you-feel basis. www.ride-on-dinner.net

3. **prep**
   Can you do your shopping and organising by pedal-power?
   Can you do your food prep beforehand at the ride’s meeting location? People will be trusting you rather than the law, so be really hygienic.
   Pre-plan the layout of vehicle stations and equipment for the main-meal location in the sequence of helmet-lining, cooking and serving.

4. **first to roll-up, first for dinner**
   Cyclists gather for 15+ minutes in open visible location. *Lube-boy host* mingle and lets cyclists know to ride close together as a swarm, how long ride will take, and where it will finish. *Lube-boy* offers to grease the wheels and ushers cyclists to gradually move toward threshold “line”.

Victorian Government’s State of Design Festival seeks a ride-on-dinner to compliment an event in its winter program. The Cultural Transports Collective decline.

Anthony’s kitchen trailer receives numerous design awards and is exhibited at Object Galleries (Sydney) and Melbourne Museum.
5. **greeting ritual**
Cyclists are greeted by *happiness hosts* as they pass through a threshold line, with exchange of names and conversation as desired. The hosts attach a red-cloth napkin around the neck of each cyclist, with gentle performance qualities as desired. Cyclists move past the threshold to the adjoining area for first course.

6. **everyone pedals their power**
A crescendo of bike-made sounds signal the swarm to start moving. Food-carrying vehicles lead, hungry cyclists follow. *Shepherding cyclists* compact the density of the swarm. Everyone mixes it up with everyone.

7. **ride-on and fork-off**
Throw a fork in the route before the main-meal location. The *lube-boy host* entices the swarm in one direction. The food-carrying vehicles and *food hosts* fork off in the other direction to arrive at the location about 10-15 minutes earlier to set up vehicle stations, burners and pots.

8. **eat your head**
Arrive at main-meal location. *Happiness hosts* make a flat work surface. Lay 1 sheet greaseproof paper onto 2 sheets half folded broadsheet newspaper. Fold 4 times into long flat cone-shape radiating from one corner. Fold base of cone in half from bottom apex toward the top. Open inside of short cone to reveal greaseproof inner-lining and place inside helmet of the next cyclist who wants to eat. (Pre-prepare some pre-folded liners.) Cyclist presents their helmet to *food hosts* for dinner. Repeat, add conversation, humour, warm feeling and curiosity to suit.

9. **donate-as-you-feel**
*Happiness hosts* announce: “donate-as-you-feel” into their upturned, lined helmets (with gentle performance qualities as desired).

10. **ride-on-dinner**
Delighted cyclist bodies, a spirited social body, and the beguiling body of the city entwined in chance relations.
2010

Object Galleries in Sydney liases with Anthony Hamilton-Smith in seeking to offer a ride-on-dinner as part of the Sydney Design Festival.

Mick moderates the Melbourne Cycle Forum initiated by the Victorian Government’s State of Design Festival, to respond to the presentation of Mikael Colville-Andersen on Copenhagenize: Four Goals for Promoting Urban Cycling on 24 July.

Mick writes “ride-on-dinner DIY recipe #1” as an open-source way of sharing the know-how of ride-on-dinner as an informal cultural intervention.

Object Galleries use the DIY recipe #1 to cook up their preferred version of ride-on-dinner with a formalised booking and $20 up-front fee as part of the Sydney Design Festival on 14 August.

The ride-on-dinner website is loaded up with the DIY recipe #1. An email is sent widely with intent that it may trigger the viral distribution of the ride-on-dinner idea through international social networks.
GUSTATION
Savour the ride-on-dinner experience.

1. **free-wheeling feeling**
   feeling the independence of being with a swarm.
   feeling surrender to the entrainment affects of the swarm.
   feeling responsible for power and rewarded by self-authorising power.
   feeling the elements with the body and that make-up the body.

2. **making zeitgeist**
   making sensations linking food, transport and human power.
   making relations with people present here and now.
   making social interest with demonstrated interest.
   making the taste of things to come.

3. **passing-on**
   passing-on open pleasure in gift economics.
   passing-on know-how of living with food and transport and the city.
   passing-on documentation to archive at www.ride-on-dinner.net
   passing-on the recipe for ride-on-dinner with improvement and variation.

4. **spinning-off**
   spinning-off the possibilities of creative conversation.
   spinning-off the power of acting individually and collectively.
   spinning-off the chance of people meeting and tastes savoured.
   spinning-off food to grow, places to pedal, ways to go.
pedal your power, t-shirt and image, Mick Douglas 2007, photo Neal Haslem.
ride-on-dinner infrastructure: clockwise from top (1) cloth napkin, Mick Douglas and Michelle Vanspall 2007; (2) invite card, Neal Haslem 2009; (3) eat your head helmet lining, Mick Douglas 2006; (4) apron, Mick Douglas 2009; (5) change vehicle, Mick Douglas with Ben Goodall, RMIT University Industrial Design students and Jason Parmington 2007-10. Photos Mick Douglas & Ben Landau.
ride-on-dinner #4, welcome from a happiness host, part of Urban Interior Occupation, commencing at Craft Victoria Gallery, Melbourne 2008, photo Jacob Walker.
ride-on-dinner #5, taste 1 tomato sugo, part of West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial, Melbourne 2009, photo Karen Trist.
ride-on-dinner #5, part of West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial, Melbourne 2009, photo Karen Trist.
ride-on-dinner #5, part of West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial, Melbourne 2009, photo Karen Trist.
ride-on-dinner #4, first course, part of Urban Interior Occupation, commencing at Craft Victoria Gallery, Melbourne 2008, photos Jacob Walker.
happenstance circling at the base of a ferris wheel beside the Yarra River during ride-on-dinner #4, Melbourne 2008, stills from video Ben Landau.
human body digestion route / urban body riding route, ride-on-dinners 1-5, Mick Douglas 2009.
eat your head helmet lining, Mick Douglas 2006.
a human body
a swarming social body
the body of a city
food system
transport system
social system
Karachi minibus crashes
Melbourne tram
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey Title:</th>
<th><strong>W11-TRAM</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carriage:</td>
<td>transporting cultural transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOURNEY TYPE:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration:</td>
<td>2006-2007 (further travel tbc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motive:</td>
<td>hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode Of Mobility:</td>
<td>hybridological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOURNEY ELEMENTS:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure:</td>
<td>Mode of Transport: Melbourne tram / Karachi mini-bus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools:</td>
<td>Tickets, catalogues, conductor bags, uniform shirts, badges, stickers, Pakistani music tapes, improvised percussion devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Relations:</td>
<td>Carriage Artist: Mick Douglas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role:</td>
<td>project concept, Melbourne coordinator, onboard co-host (1st season); project artist &amp; onboard co-host (2nd season).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social model:</td>
<td>hybridised hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactics:</td>
<td>decorating, adorning, amplifying. transposing, hybridising, articulating. hosting, carnivalising, performing. agitating, mobilising, dancing. encountering, dialoguing, enunciating. cajoling, improvising, participating. lapping, encircling, incorporating.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**JOURNEY DOCUMENTATION:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digital Archive:</th>
<th><a href="http://www.tramtactic.net">www.tramtactic.net</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Official Journey Documents:**


**Video:**

- *piyar zindagi hai / love is life*, Mick Douglas, 12 mins, 2006. (video from the first season of W-11 Tram.)
- *TramOverheard! TramOverboard! TramOtherwise!: an art of journeys*, Mick Douglas, 10 mins, 2010 (video from the second season of W-11 Tram.)

**Associated Publications:**


**Reviews:**

1978-1993 The Victorian Government’s arts and transport portfolios jointly administered the **Transporting Art** project, which commissioned 39 artists to each paint a W-class tram that would be used in regular passenger service.

1994 Mick Douglas makes a negative shadow of the Melbourne Town Hall clock-tower appear (on the stair-risers of the adjacent Regent Theatre entrance) in hand-cut light-emitting **phosphorescent self-adhesive film** as part of his temporary public art installation.


Karachi based artists Durriya Kazi and David Alesworth engage **Karachi truck painters and decorators** in the production of their artworks. Their collaborative artwork *My Sweet Medina* is exhibited in the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT3) in Brisbane, and is questioned by some critics for not giving adequate credit to the decorators. Passing through Melbourne, Durriya, also Head of Department of Visual Studies at University of Karachi, walks through the door at RMIT University and **meets** Mick Douglas to discuss design courses.

2000 Durriya shows Mick **truck decorating workshops of Karachi** during Mick’s visit to advise University of Karachi on establishing an industrial design course.

6.17am 11.09.2001 Broadcast footage of the **S-11** terrorist strike on the New York Twin Towers is transmitted via television in the foyer of the Fitzroy swimming pool in inner Melbourne. The footage of aeroplanes forcefully hitting the towers repeatedly lap the screens on all media channels.

16.11.2001 United States President George Bush uses the term **“crusade”** to describe the “war on terror”, commencing a global period of controversial communication and awkward relations between the “West” and people of Islamic faith.

November 2001 In the lead-up to the November Australian federal election, several Howard government ministers make public allegations that sea-faring asylum seekers had thrown **children overboard** in a presumed ploy to secure rescue and passage to Australia. A subsequent Senate inquiry found the claim was not supported by evidence, and that the government had known this prior to the election. The government was criticised for misleading the public and cynically exploiting voters’ fears of a wave of illegal immigrants by demonising asylum-seekers.
GATHERING MOMENTUM

When invited to develop a transport-based arts project for Festival Melbourne 2006, the cultural festival of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games, I decided to collaborate with vehicle decorators of Karachi (Pakistan) and so came to meet chamak pati walas Nusrat Iqbal, Muhammad Nadeem and Safdar Ali. In an era of much fear-mongering after the twin towers terrorism crisis of September 11, my premise was simply to transpose a typical Karachi experience of travel by decorated mini-bus in an Islamic society, onto a typical Melbourne experience of travel by tram in an increasingly cosmopolitan society. I wondered what kind of space of hospitality could be produced departing from the gesture of a Karachi mini-bus crashing into a Melbourne tram.

It will be the first time that Nusrat Iqbal and his team of vehicle decorators have moved outside Pakistan. They are more likely to be found in a workshop at one end of the longest mini-bus route that traverses the city of Karachi. The large fleet of buses that ply this route are known beyond the city for their passionate and decorative displays, often featuring the image of a peacock amongst a vibrant dance of colour, sparkling reflection and flashing light. The route name “W-11” appears in variously stylised letters on the front windscreen of each privately owned mini-bus.

In the contemporary connected metropolis, the advertising industry knows very well that road vehicles have a profitable capacity to attract public attention. The globally affected consumer may expect to see the branding of well-known corporations and products clad to the sides of the vehicles that shuttle our urban landscapes. Thankfully, the decorated vehicles plying the W-11 route are a contemporary anomaly.

Iqbal’s small workshop is itself without decoration. It holds only a few hand tools and is scattered with cuttings of multi-coloured self-adhesive plastic sheeting. A couple of loose photographic prints are stuck to one wall. Iqbal and his workshop partner are pictured on folding chairs on a Karachi beach, cooling their feet in the shallows of the Arabian Sea, perhaps facing toward the global south.

“This will be the greatest tram ever seen” beams Iqbal, imagining the transformation of a tram that will circle the city of Melbourne in 2006. It is a strange turn. Trams have not been seen in Karachi since the 1970s, when the diesel engine-driven trams were laid to rest. Tramways systems were spawned throughout the British Empire at the turn of the 19th century: in Karachi, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and many more. Tramways were then a symbolic display, for better or worse, of what the Empire could bring to its colonies. Initially horse-drawn, some systems then went to elaborate underground cable-driven systems, and later moved to electrified systems—as in the case of Melbourne’s trams; or from horse-drawn to engine-driven—as in the case of Karachi. Melbourne is one of the few cities of the Commonwealth to have retained and expanded the tramways system, along with Calcutta. In spite of the worldwide closures of tramways in the 1960s and 70s, this mode of public transport now enjoys a worldwide return, with numerous new systems having been built in the last decade as part of encouraging sustainable urban living. Trams are a public transport with the potential to be moving spaces offering hospitality: spaces giving carriage to the many; spaces accepting strangers and the unexpected and the uninvited.
20.3.2003 The United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Poland invade Iraq. Two stickers with text subsequently circulate Melbourne for a number of years: “No War for Oil” and “Burn Fat not Oil”, commonly seen on bicycles.

2004 Mick begins exploring the small thriving improvised performance scene in inner Melbourne.

2005 Melbourne company Global Art Projects, engaged to deliver the exhibitions program of the cultural festival of the 2006 Commonwealth Games, invite Mick Douglas to propose a transport-based arts project engaging with artists and artisans of Commonwealth nations. Mick and Durriya agree to collaborate on the project to involve Pakistani vehicle decorators.

Mick and Durriya visit chamak pati (adhesive vinyl) vehicle decorators working on the W-11 route mini-buses in Karachi. The stand-out work and personality is that of chamak pati wala Nusrat Iqbal, who is invited to participate.

Mick delivers a talk on “crossings of art and design” in guest lecture at University of Karachi.

Regional Victorian city Bendigo most interested in hosting W-11 Tram project, whilst Melbourne’s tramways operator private company Yarra Trams, and the Victorian Government’s Department of Infrastructure is uninterested. Unsubstantiated rumours abound, including that “Indians in the Department of Infrastructure are negative toward the project.” Yarra Trams has a change of CEO. A link is made between an executive of the government’s Office of the Commonwealth Games Coordination and the new CEO via a mutual friend. Yarra Trams agrees to participate on the project.

December 2006 Mick arranges confirmation payment and instruction that chamak pati wala Nusrat Iqbal is engaged to decorate a Melbourne tram as he would decorate a W-11 minibus. Iqbal and walas produce decorations for Melbourne Z-class tram no. 81, from drawings provided, in their Karachi workshop over 8 weeks working day and night.

10.47pm Thursday 2.2.2006 Mick opens a polite email message from a staff member of the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), formerly stationed in Pakistan, now in Canberra, whom is known to Durriya. The Australian Secret Intelligence Office (ASIO) overlaps duties with DFAT. Reply to the email includes Mick openly revealing his home address. Subsequent events include: (i) observation of a previously unsighted person in a car repeatedly parked adjacent to Mick’s home in mornings over February-March 2006; (ii) the DFAT staff member and friend, both large and wearing dark overcoats, being welcomed by Mick to his family home at a March evening event in celebration of completing the tram decoration phase of the project. These two people spend a curious 15minutes unaccompanied in Mick’s home whilst all others remained in the park at front of the home; (iii) the staff member requesting to be removed from the W-11 TRAM group email notice list in November 2006.
Decorating transport is an ancient practice in many cultures, including the Indus valley. Camels, ox carts, river-boats and horses have long been personalised with decorative devices. Modern transport in Pakistan remained unadorned until the 1960s when ownership moved away from the elite to the working classes. The services of court painters who migrated from Kutch Bhuj in the Gujarat were then sought to adorn motorised vehicles. There are also influences from domestic traditions of decorating what is valued, from shrines to brides, which has come to be transferred to modern possessions like ghetto blasters. As new materials have arrived in the market—radium colours, reflective tape, LCD light displays, and even the woodcarving and inlay crafts of Kashmir—they have found their way into truck décor. Even poetry, the pastime of Pakistani people, has been incorporated to reflect personal philosophies. The exterior and interior of the trucks have become moving palaces for the new kings of the road: an ongoing competitive spirit of embellishment developing into what is now a sophisticated art form. A new style of vehicle decorating came about in the 1970s with the advent of city buses able to service flexible routes to meet the needs of fast growing urban centres. Unlike other countries where vehicles are decorated mostly by spray-painting images on the surface, the structures of Pakistani trucks and now buses are actually designed with decoration in mind. Trucks originally had larger panels made of wood, and so were suited to decoration with painted images, while buses of steel with more contours prompted the development of a decorative style of repousse stainless steel, coloured acrylic plastic and reflective tape filigree with its own distinctive language.

Owners of the W-11 route buses, mostly Muhajirs, Punjabis or migrants from India at Partition, spend an enormous amount on decoration, motivated in part by rivalry with one another, and by the love of colour, splendour and display. Yet vehicle decoration has no economic benefit. A key to understanding why so much effort and expense goes into decoration, in spite of the obvious poverty faced by these very people, may lie in the aesthetics of shrines and the role of superstition in the spiritual temperament of Pakistani people. A commonly held belief is that unless the source of one’s livelihood is properly honoured, it will not prosper. Amongst profane imagery and poetry, the decoration of the buses incorporates prayers, cloths from shrines tied to rails and every bus has a child’s shoe hidden in its decoration for good luck!1

In an increasingly homogenising and homogenised world, this practice of passionate sanctioned decoration is exceptional. How might the act of transporting this decoration practice from Karachi bus to Melbourne tram open up different kinds of journeys? The rich layering of surface ornamentation common in much of the world’s cultures, yet reduced in the Western world’s 20th century modernism, provides a visual modality through which a multiplicity of signification can connect with a culturally diverse audience. How will such a project negotiate the multiple hierarchical layers of power that will be at play in an event of such high international profile as a Commonwealth Games, at a time of high anxiety around security?

1 Durriya Kazi has researched and collaborated with Pakistani vehicle decorators since the 1980s. Her knowledge informs this introduction, an earlier version of which has been published in Mick Douglas & Durriya Kazi, W-11: Karachi to Melbourne: a freely distributed catalogue to the project’s first season for the Cultural Festival of the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games.
Friday 3.2.2006

Five Pakistani men of ages 18-35 years are to work on a vehicle of public transport infrastructure due for regular central-city service during an international high-profile event post 9-11. After months of negotiations no relevant government authority is willing to sign-off on the insurance liability for the project. Mick draws attention to the stalemate and proposes to cancel the project. Urgency of the matter initiates a higher level of attention from key government officers.

3:40pm Monday 6.2.2006

“It is hereby declared and agreed that this policy covers all activities relating to the Pakistani Tram Project, as a part of the Festival Melbourne 2006.” This Confirmation of Insurance Cover from the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority for $750,000,000 is arranged by VicTrack, the State Government authority responsible for rail based transport infrastructure.

Tuesday 7.2.2006

Durriya travels from Karachi to the Australian Embassy in Islamabad to obtain the visas for four of five Pakistani chamak pati walas granted entry to Australia, with one man’s application pending, subjected to a higher level evaluation process. Timber crates of decoration materials are packed for airfreight from Karachi to Melbourne.

8.30pm Sunday 12.2.2006

Four Pakistani men arrive in Melbourne from Karachi after taking their first ever aeroplane flight on their first occasion to leave Pakistan. Mick meets the four men at Melbourne airport and establishes them in motel accommodation in Preston. One week later the motel manager will object to Mick that these men are bringing an unwelcome body odour into the motel’s morning breakfast room.

9.00am Monday 13.2.2006

Three non-English speaking Pakistani decorators and the Urdu-English bi-lingual project production co-ordinator arrive with Mick at Preston Tram Workshops to commence the 4-week residency with a health and safety induction. Cross-cultural disjunction ensues. With frustration at the briefing of rules after one hour, Iqbal gestures by thrusting his hand on his heart, then to his forehead, then both hands up in the air to Allah. The Workshop is a worksite formerly of 300 staff but now with only 40 staff. In the last week the chamak pati walas are trusted by management when using metal-cutting shears without hand-gloves and swivelling the sheet-metal with bare feet whilst squatted on the workshop floor. Respect and admiration is evidently offered to the chamak pati walas from many Workshop staff for their level of hand-craftsmanship and the visual power of their work, but their music and smells of spicy food remain less appreciated.

Friday 17.2.2006

The Pakistani decorators join Mick and eighty others on bicycles in the first ride-on-dinner as the finale event of the Pedal-Powered Vehicles Workshop that Mick concurrently hosted at RMIT School of Architecture & Design.
MOMENT OF DEPARTURE

I requested that Iqbal and his mob of *chamak patti wals* simply do to a Melbourne tram what they would do to a Karachi mini-bus, and do it well. Also, bring the same music that is characteristically blasting through the speaker system on the buses—at least when not near the Karachi traffic police who prohibit it. Toward the end of the decorating process at Preston Tram Workshops in Melbourne, a crucial moment of signification needed to be negotiated. Iqbal had reserved large panels of the tram-sides for text. He proposed to write in Urdu and English “Princess of Melbourne”. I understood the feminisation of the vehicle, the claim of pride and the display of honour as part of this culture of decoration practice. But in Australia I’m also mindful of *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, Princesses Anne and Diana, the Royalty and that counter-cry to Commonwealth: “stolen wealth!” Mmm, how does this act of naming operate in this transnational encounter? In Karachi it is customary for the vehicle owner who commissions a vehicle’s decoration to request popular un-attributed poetry and specify statements of wisdom and aspiration to adorn the vehicle. The decorated vehicle culture has emerged from a well-entrenched feudal structure of relations, partly serving as a display of the power, magnanimity and cultural investment of the owner, which in turn brushes off on its decorators, drivers, conductors and passengers. The power at play in my relation with my Pakistani collaborators is undeniable, yet the motives for my deployment of power are far from wanting to allude to the power relations of Monarchy at a time of a “Commonwealth” event. I recall the text I had seen on a minibus in Karachi “piyar zindagi hai”, translated to me as “love is life”. That is what will be written on this tram. Let us depart.
7.3.2006
French tram manufacturer Alstom commences posturing for an upcoming Victorian Government tender to provide new trams for Melbourne by launching a student design competition to design the “face” of the tram. For his invited presentation at the competition launch Mick discusses “pulling faces on a tram”. He recognises the fellow speaker who is representing a disability access advocacy group, herself in a wheelchair, as a practitioner of contact improvisation dance. Mick advocates to students that their designs consider desirable qualities of tram-travel experience, unknowingly provoking: “imagine if your tram prompted people to dance in it!” Unbeknown to Mick, dancing becomes an activity with great momentum aboard the W-11 TRAM first season.

10.3.2006
Durriya and Mick explore “The Art of Transport” in a guest lecture at AsiaLink—Sidney Myer Asia Centre Melbourne. Two brothers Muhammed Ali Khan and Salibat Khan attend. They later become regular passengers with their family, and in the project second season become regular fellow hosts. The Khan family of outer Geelong become important supporters of the ongoing project and enter into exchanging hospitality with Mick and family.

11.3.2006
The W-11 Tram undergoes a thorough inspection at Preston Workshops by representatives of the tramways & rail authorities, the Commonwealth Games and government organisers.

10am-9pm
15-26 March 2006

**W-11 TRAM:**
Karachi to Melbourne Extraordinarily moving rides on the free City Circle tram route travelling Melbourne / Karachi during Festival Melbourne 2006. A temporary art intervention project involving a Melbourne tram transformed in collaboration with vehicle decorators from Karachi and with onboard performing hosts. 12 days of free service—130 circles of the city—20,000 memento tickets—80,000 passengers.

Extensive media coverage in Australia (The Age and Herald Sun newspapers; ABC and SBS radio; ABC and commercial TV) and Pakistan (Dawn and News on Sunday newspapers; commercial TV). Chamak pati walas regard the W-11 Tram as a queen and they feel like kings.

Two film documents are made as part of the project. Vajid Ali, a recent Karachi University visual arts graduate, works as production coordinator of the decorating, as translator and documentor. He makes a documentary film W-11: Karachi 2 Melbourne (video on DVD, 45mins) that is broadcast on national Pakistani television numerous times. Mick makes an art video piyar zindagi hai / love is life (video on DVD, 12mins) from footage taken by passengers and fellow hosts.

Festival Melbourne 2006, the cultural festival of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games provides the largest ever arts budget for free public events in Victoria. A unique moment in Melbourne’s civic culture unfolds.
Two cultures collided when Melbourne’s Preston tram workshop meets North Karachi chamak patti practice. “No tension!” the Pakistani’s would banter. Respect and friendship emerged, and a gloriously hand elaborated tram opened its doors, revealing lettering on the entrance steps: “wel-come”.

“W-gerah! W-gerah! W-gerah! Double A! Double A!” the onboard hosts scream out the tram’s doors whilst thumping open hands onto the metal interior panels. You enter a transporting and transforming social space that transposes something of both Melbourne and Karachi to produce a third space of possibility.

When standing on the ground of the city street one has a firm tie to cultural codes of conduct, to social prohibitions and to the affordances and inhibitions of self-perceptions. Enter the W-11 TRAM and you enter an ambiguous territory where the codes, rules and organising structures of space and time are uncertain. You can be different.

The enthusiastic marketing manager of the 2006 Commonwealth Games hops aboard the W-11 TRAM and again urges me to attach the Games logo in large size to the front ends of the tram. “Ah yes, it must be back at the workshop. Will do,” I respond. Thankfully the topic of conversation is easily moved along, as I maintain my resistance to boring “branding” imperatives preceding people’s encounters with the artistic matter of the project itself.

Three-quarters of the seats were occupied on the second morning of the tram’s journey through the twelve autumn days of Commonwealth Games cultural festival. Some passengers gaze into the window and its reflections of the tram interior patterning, imagery and people. Friends excitedly chat and point to decorative details. A young man moves through the tram with his mobile-phone camera at arms length pointing his digital attention here and there. Feet tap to the popular Pakistani folk music of Madame Noor Jehan as bodies roll with the tram’s movement. A group of four women move their shoulders in waves, at first in self-conscious jest to each other. But five minutes later they persist with genuine pleasure. My fellow hosts from Karachi and Melbourne are delighting in the openness of social spirit we find ourselves enmeshed within. We share artwork tickets—based on decorative details of the tram—and prompt playful conversation. People’s responses reveal that they want to move and be moved; to embrace the dance of life in its contingency.

The W-11 TRAM seemed to be transporting a spirit of generosity and a lust for life as it encircled the city of Melbourne on the free city-circle route, as if it were radiating an aura of goodwill outward and onward. Can a tram scream a celebration of life and love? Yes, according to passenger Aliyah Mohyeddin, who enthuses that the W-11 TRAM is “an affirmation of the beauty of inclusion and multiculturalism that is Melbourne today”. For passenger Paul Molyneux “public transport normally silences and closes people down. W-11 allows people to open up and celebrate the moment”.

---


3 Paul Molyneux, ibid.
A temporary bamboo outdoor cinema is purpose-built for film screening both W-11: Karachi 2 Melbourne and piyar zindagi hai / love is life for one night in Karachi on the closed major road of Allah Walli to the elated community of W-11 mini-bus decorators, drivers, conductors, owners and passengers. Supported by City District Government Karachi and Department of Visual Studies University of Karachi.

Mick feels strange being presented with a plaque, said to be equivalent to “the keys to the city” by the Naib Nazim (Deputy Mayor) Nasreen Jalil of the City District Government Karachi over lunch. Mick generally showered in gifts to attempt to bring back to Melbourne. Nadeem, Safdar and Iqbal gift Mick a chamak pati work with the words “mick: chamak pati wala”.

An exhibition is held to share the project with the higher end of society. Titled W11 Karachi 2 Melbourne; held at the V.M. Art Gallery, Rangoonwala Community Centre, Karachi; featuring the chamak pati Nusrat Iqbal, Mohammad Nadeem & Safdar Ali, the videos of Vajid Ali, Mick Douglas & Marsha Berry, and the photography of Karen Trist.

Lots of encouragement in Melbourne to have the popularly regarded “Karachi tram” return to service in Melbourne.

Mick secures funding from VicHeath, City of Melbourne, Yarra Trams and Victorian Multicultural Commission to host a second season of the W-11 TRAM project, with an increased emphasis on the performance onboard. A moustache of dubious subcontinent style appears to be growing on Mick.

Mick talks of Cultural Transport at “Contention or Consensus: A national symposium of art in public space and social change” at Gasworks Arts Park Melbourne, 12 October.

W-11 TRAM: an art of journeys free entry...no bookings... all welcome

A collaborative art project conceived and hosted by Mick Douglas exploring journeys of dialogue, performance and hospitality. Operating for twenty Friday evenings undertaking six 50-minute laps on the City Circle tram route with three programs of events onboard a tram transformed by Pakistani vehicle decorators. Twenty pairs of high profile strangers meet to have an “overheard” conversation whilst travelling a lap of the city; twenty different groups of artists lead an “overboard” improvised performance journey for a lap of the city; 20,000 souvenir artwork tickets are gifted and 40,000 enthusiastic passengers “otherwise” encountered one another in a uniquely disarming free public setting. Onboard hosts from Karachi and Melbourne break the ice of public inhibitions, cajoling strangers to share a bit of themselves and discover the potential of experience across cultural and generational differences.

Project website <www.tramtactic.net> has an average of 145 sessions (series of clicks) per day during the season, with the highest proportion of visits between 10 and 30 minutes.
Adorned with a leather bag of tickets and a lightness of human touch, the onboard hosts and I gather an increasing awareness of the multiple levels of travel underway.

The tram laps up the city, providing an infectiously disarming public space fostering dynamic social encounters, movement of bodies and shifts of emotion. I recognise a desire in passengers and in myself to inhabit the rhythm of the moment, to flirt with ambiguity, to ride the passage of uncertainty with strangers and friends. The loud Pakistani Punjabi folk music has palpable affects upon people’s bodies. The most unlikely people reveal a glimmer in their eye, revealing a desire to transcend a little inhibition and make light of themselves. I offer a ticket and when I feel so inclined I offer my hand. I offer permission. I offer myself as companion, jester, guide and fool to give carriage in the company of strangers. An air of the carnivalesque encircles the city in an unprecedented way. For the twelve days of Festival Melbourne 2006, the W-11 TRAM travels 120 laps of the city, gives carriage to 80,000 passengers and gifts 20,000 memento tickets. A tramways worker comments that after twenty-five years working on public transport he’s never seen people leaving a vehicle with such a good feeling.

The front window of Iqbal’s 3x3 meter North Karachi workshop marks the otherworldly connections of his work with a simple sign: W-11 Karachi 2 Melbourne. His community of W-11 drivers, conductors and owners turned out in droves on a September 2006 night for an on-street film-screening showing their decorative world of W-11 in its Melbournian manifestation. They roared, taken aback and elsewhere: affirmed, transported and transformed in their self-perceived relevance to the greater world. They too joined a journey, along with those of us who’ve collaborated closely. We are now travelling together.

The momentum gives rise to a second season for the project, allowing further exploration into the multiplicity of journeying. Over the 2006-2007 summer in Melbourne, the W-11 TRAM collaborative art project explores dialogue, performance and hospitality through three types of journeys over 20 Friday evenings.

“Tram Overheard” has two special strangers meet on a tram. They talk, feeling their way, prompting a tram-load of passengers to listen in to the magic of dialogue whilst the W-11 TRAM travels a lap of the city. Each week two guests came aboard to undertake an amplified conversation discussing personal journeys and issues of mobility and migration, transportation and cultural change, hospitality and the public realm. Conversationalists included known voices alongside people less heard, with each dialogue tracing a line through the civic reality of Melbourne here and now. Guests were asked to reflect on one or more particular themes of the W-11 TRAM project without preparing what to say. The dialogue between each pair of guests is ignited by the frisson of strangeness and newness in their encounter. In the course of a 50 minute circular journey together, the conversationalists come to recognise each other as someone they can talk to as they find themselves producing connections and weaving unique lines of dialogical thought. Passengers enter and exit the tram at will, listen in or undertake their own conversation with a friend or stranger nearby. The informality of the setting provokes honest, unpretentious and usually accessible conversation. Some passengers would experience a sudden realisation that the amplified conversation was actually generated from people sitting very near to them,
## TRAM OVERHEARD
### journeys of dialogue:

1. **John So** + Joy Murphy discuss and perform the different ways in which they have roles as hosts.

2. Waleed Aly + Tony Birch traveling ideas of what it is to “belong” and hold allegiance.

3. Rod Quantock + Azhar Usman exploring the underbelly of Muslim and mainstream Australia.

4. Graeme Davison + Wim Hafkamp talking transport as more of the world starts listening to issues of climate change.

5. Neil Thomas + David Wells rattling around Santa, love, giving and taking.


7. Ashis Nandy + Don Miller talking of uncertainty, paradox and everyday rhythm of life.

8. Les Twentyman + Samar Mougharbel talking of the city life that new migrants, refugees and homeless youth encounter.

9. Linda Briskman + David Corlett talk through journeys into issues of asylum, detention and human rights in Australia.


## TRAM OVERBOARD
### journeys of performance:

1. Zeeshan Medhi + Mr Robi performing popular Pakistani songs with vocals & tabla.

2. BYAR (Adrian Sherriff, Adam King & Jeremy Dullard) performing West Sumatran processional music on talimpong and rebanna.

3. Shahin Shafaei confronting passengers with a segregationist tactic.

4. Rod Quantock swinging left and right with passengers on the eve of the Victorian State Election.

5. Azaad Bhangra Group didn’t show up, but passengers sure dance to dhol drum beats that resonate far from the Punjab.


7. W-11 TRAM weeping oil, so the tram limped back to the depot for repairs.

8. Shoaib Safi & IM singing group performing Sufi devotional songs in alternation with vocal songs with a wee Christmas festive influence.

9. Third Floor Dixie (Tony Hicks + Niko Schauble) make up enamouring improvised jazz tracks in a kind of tram way.

10. SPARKELO sponsored the journey this week. Two cleaners act out a clean-up to a perplexed and delighted load of passengers.

## TRAM OTHERWISE
### journeys of encounter

1. Hosting artist Mick Douglas encounters the fellow hosting artists and passengers as follows.

2. Roberto D’Andrea, former Melbourne tram conductor now performer, encounters Mick in 1995 with the two building a long-standing collaborative relationship through the tramjatra project. And so Roberto hosts.

3. Rob Eales, designer, encounters Mick through a student-staff relationship at RMIT University and works as production assistant to the chamak pati walas in early 2006, then is invited to host.

4. Khalid Jamil, a graphic designer and relation of Duniya Kazi, encounters Mick when writing an article for a Karachi newspaper on W-11 tram during the Commonwealth Games, and subsequently frequents the tram until being invited to host.

5. Syed Muhammad Ahsan and Khurram Shabir Rathod, business students just arrived in Melbourne from Karachi in mid 2006, encounter Mick when hopping on board the W-11 TRAM every week after discovering it in the third week of the second season. Four weeks later Mick invites them to host.

6. Salabat Khan, postgraduate engineering student, encounters Mick at a Melbourne University Asialink talk before the Commonwealth Games. He frequents the first season with his family and is invited to host the second season.
as one passenger commented, “I thought I was listening to the radio! It’s great!” The most interesting dialogues demonstrated a process of building and entwining the inter-dependence of each speaker’s ideas, stories and logic to produce something truly dialogical and unique to its situational happening. Some of the participating strangers reflected on this aspect, commenting^4 on how traveling a lap of the city became entwined with the structure of dialogue:

Akin to those kinds of conversations you have with family, [...] the organic pattern started by the tram just kept growing like a vine! — Marie Sierra.

[... ] totally shaped by the very movement of the tram, its decorations, the general public, the means of recording. — Philipa Rothfield.

[...] the informal encounter on a tram worked for me [...] the tram setting did create sufficient triggers for the conversation [...] movement is particularly reassuring when thinking: it fixes the mind while allowing for flexibility. — Sudesh Mishra.

“Tram Overboard” has invited artists leading an improvised performance journey for a lap of the city. Over the season, musicians, comedians, performance artists and dancers explore the highly charged environment of contingent and dynamic performance conditions. The more engaged performances play with the circular nature of the departure—travel—return pattern of the tram journey lapping the city. Jazz saxophonist Tony Hicks produced a soundscape in interaction with the hum and whirring of the tram’s electrical system. Two artists presenting themselves as a group named “Sparkel” jump aboard as professional cleaners and proceed to build an ambiguous and challenging performance of “cleaning” the tram and its passengers. People are at first unsuspecting of the live art performance but slowly become aware of the constructed nature of the occasion over the course of the journey. Performers and passengers become evidently excited by the exuberance of the tram environment and the attention the tram attracts in the streetscape.

“Tram Otherwise” has the onboard hosting artists from Melbourne & Karachi leading a journey of cultural collisions, interacting with passengers and breaking the ice of public inhibitions. We cajole strangers to discover a new experience across cultural and generational differences whilst being gifted artwork tickets and encountering music that transports. For two laps of the city at peak evening travelling time, and for the last two evening laps, the W-11 TRAM continues the format of journey first offered during the Commonwealth Games: simply playing the music commonly heard on the Karachi W11 decorated mini-buses. An invigorated process of social interaction takes place between people who may not usually engage with each other when on public transport. Hosts develop skills enticing interaction amongst people that challenges individual’s sense of public inhibition. For some, this is simply speaking amongst strangers; for others it becomes licence to openly explore witty conversational exchange

^4 Feedback comments gained by the author through personal email correspondence from the participants between November 2006 and April 2007.
TRAM OVERHEARD
journeys of dialogue:

11 Ann Curthoys + Keith Butler discuss riding and writing between colonialism and postcolonialism.

12 Pamela Curr + Nikos Papastergiadis talk of mobility, possibility and nationalism on Australia Day.

13 Stephen Muecke + Mark Minchin open up trust in movement and traveling.

14 Kate Darian-Smith + Fethi Mansouri explore the tensions of social diversity and cohesion against the backdrop of Australia and the Middle East.

15 Marie Sierra + Lawrence Harvey shape a conversation about space in this city, departing from its heard and sculpted examples.

16 Andrew Brown-May + Roberto D’Andrea traveling through Melbourne street life.

17 Sudesh Mishra + Phillipa Rothfield explore transnational movement in body gestures, human subjectivities, and cultural forms.

18 Suzie Attiwill + Nusra Latif Qureshi discuss the making of the W11 tram’s decoration and its affects.

19 Vin D’cruz + Michele Grossman unpack the ambivalences, tensions and multiple allegiances of migrant experience.

20 Leela Gandhi + Mick Douglas open up personal and political dimensions of friendship, hospitality and art.

TRAM OVERBOARD
journeys of performance:

11 Ocular Lab make bread.

12 boat-people.org take on Australia day with a trivia quiz and bonza prizes, hosted by Mrs. B. Wight and Mrs B. Wright of the John Howard Ladies Auxiliary Fan Club

13 Zarafa lead an intoxicating gypsy musical voyage.

14 The Brides seek men with song.

15 Bent Leather Band nod to Percy Grainger’s “Big Green Tram” and give an extraordinary acoustic experience to a lap of the city.

16 Brahim Benhim leads a journey of Moroccan rhythms.

17 Yumi Umiumare + Tony Yap carve a space for a physical dance passage.

18 Ria Soemardjo + Chris Sprague + Myfanwy Alderson map a version of a world with sounds in a tram.

19 Snawklor (Dylan Mantorell And Nathan Gray) wrap a lap of the city in loops of sound.

20 Shoaib Safi + Hi God People build up an improvised musical wonderland.

TRAM OTHERWISE
journeys of encounter

7 Imran Kurd encounters Mick at his studio when Mick sought him out for his event entrepreneurship in the Melbourne Pakistani community, and is subsequently invited to host.

8 40,000 passengers encounter the hosts and each other in a musical environment exploring Pakistani Punjabi folk of Madame Noor Jehan, contemporary Punjabi popular bhangra music.
and bodily expressions of dance. All passengers aboard come to be aware of their own “performance” no matter the type or level of their activity or inactivity. Gregarious passengers readily push the tram environment toward an excitable state with their dancing, some returning another Friday to do so again, whilst us hosts learn ways of pacing the waves of excitement over the evenings to maintain an unpredictable and surprising experience for a wide variety of people. Stephen Muecke’s comment after his participation as a stranger in a Tram Overheard captures something of the tenor of all these journeys: “the theme of trust developed quite nicely”.5

5 Ibid.
Mick discusses “cultural transport and an art of journeys” as a keynote conference presenter at MediaWala Festival, British Council, Delhi.

The project video *piyar zindagi hai* shown at Melbourne Pakistani community *Eid* festivals.

Chamak pati walas Nadeem, Safdar and Iqbal make regular phone calls to Mick without grasping the inter-country time difference.

Mick commences disconnecting the mobile phone at night. Mick’s small palate of Urdu words continues to shrink.


The Board of International Research in Design publish *Design Dictionary* (edited by Michael Erhoff and Timothy Marshall) citing tramjatra as an exemplary use of “ornament”—however the citing is most likely intended in more specific reference to the W-11 Tram project.

Mick decorates a bicycle helmet with remainder chamak pati for use whilst riding the Change Vehicle on the collaborative art project *ride-on-dinner*. Mick posts bicycle helmets from Melbourne to Karachi for Iqbal, Nadeem and Safdar to decorate them, then return post, as an experiment for a further collaborative project with the working title “funk head”.

Mick presents “Cultural Transport: platforms connecting the arts and transportation”, for Alfred Deakin Innovation Lecture Series at the Melbourne Town Hall in the form of a mock letter to the then Victorian Government Minister responsible for both the arts and transport portfolios.
The W-11 TRAM project offers an experience of “connectry”. That’s the made-up word that emerged in the play of language between the Karachi decorators and Melbourne artists. It describes something of what we experienced, witnessed and seemed to be enabling through this journey. “Connectry” might be a form of spontaneous hospitality practiced by individuals toward others; simple and immediate ways that connect people in a side-by-side relation, moving and being moved together. This inter-art form project works aesthetically to open up creative opportunities of relationship between artists, non-artists, stakeholders and “audience” members triggering engagement with the extraordinary contingency of life.

The project is dependant upon establishing the prerequisite platform of conditions that provide the possibilities for events to take place with the sort of high level of contingent uncertainty that keeps situations alive, dynamic and capable of affording surprise. The W-11 TRAM transports conditions for participatory cultural transformation. A by-product of the project’s spirit of active engagement and participation carries over into the project website, where its blog-style feedback function gives voice to comments, many filled with generosity. Passenger Manzoor Ahmad comments on the project’s website that this tram should have had an official role in the Australia Day Parade. For Deborah Kelly it’s an “exquisite project, so beautiful, generous, funny and hospitable”. She continues: “And while it seems to me that it’s partly an observation of cosmopolitanism, I’d also suggest that it is a self-fulfilling prophecy: it actually creates the sense of a city with its heart wide open.” For Justin Mansfield, riding the W11 TRAM “breaks down the barriers which exist between us and encourages us to engage with our neighbours without worrying about our silly inhibitions. The Tram builds community, it fosters friendship, and it nurtures joy & laughter.”

My orientation toward taking a multi-layered role in such a project had me working from artistic conception and development, through production management and program curation to performing. This rich intensity of a whole-of-project engagement enables me to generate a depth of understanding and feeling toward the project’s potential. This degree of my being embedded in living the project experience afforded me an increasing capacity to mobilise the openness of the project. Once having sensed the capacity of the project to afford experiences of cultural transformation, the challenge was to keep this affordance alive in dynamic flux: transporting the surprise and wonder of potential cultural transformation. It’s the passengers who carry this away:

We were transported away to another world with lively, interesting discussion & marvelous music...had fun meeting people & loved the experience...this marvelous Melbourne experience! — Josie & Greg.

2009

Iqbal requests money to help him buy land in North Karachi to build a family home and cease renting. Mick sends some money. The land sale proves to be illegal and does not proceed.

Mick proposes that chamak pati walas be invited as artists in residence to decorate a project led by Mick titled Live House, collaborating with Carlton Housing Estate residents in Melbourne, involves a transformed shipping container. The key funding partner is unwilling to proceed. A collective stickering approach with both computerised cutter and hand-cutting gets underway.

The two video documents W-11: Karachi 2 Melbourne, and piyar zindagi hai / love is life, shown in a video installation in Melbourne for the first time, titled moments of cultural transport as part of the exhibition “What makes this poem beautiful?” at Margaret Lawrence Gallery (Victorian College of the Arts).

2010


The W-11 Tram remains in undercover storage at the Preston Tram Workshops whilst its undercarriage bogies are utilised by a regular service tram.
It was magical. I loved being on the tram seeing the happy and bewitched people, but the bystanders looking at us as we passed was wild! The concept is a wonderful gift to Melbourne...it felt like...I had been given something very special. — Sue Thomas.10

As commuters & travelers we exist in our own micro-bubbles, and the concept of “community” is diminished by the way we all bustle through our lives so self-importantly. The Karachi Tram is an absolute joy to ride on and a true treasure of Melbourne...it breaks down the barriers which exist between us, and encourages us to engage with our neighbours without worrying about our silly inhibitions. The Tram builds community, it fosters friendship, and it nurtures joy & laughter. Not to mention that it looks simply gorgeous. — Justin Mansfield.11

The W-11 is one of the rare places where the experience of “life=art” can take place. The collective and community space of a tram is highlighted and made valuable by the rolling existence of the W-11. — Marie Sierra.12

What a delight...it put a smile on thousands of faces. Wide eyed kids pointing and laughing, Chinese tourists running after it with their cameras and people on board instantly in a happy mood. — Paul Learmonth.13

In a world increasingly coveting minimalism and searching for Zen, the tram screams its celebration of life, love and fun. — Aliyah Mohyeddin.14

People who board the tram and are wide-eyed with delight or surprise by what they encounter. The tram, its artwork and decoration, the music, the conductors, and the “tram overheard” conversations all provide a vehicle for co-travellers to connect with each other. — Paul Molyneux.15

What a delight to look up from a Melbourne footpath and see the bright lights and colour of the Karachi tram. Where are you? Please come back to cheer us up. — Chris Goodman.16

13 ibid.
W-11 Tram infrastructure: tramtactic bag, Mick Douglas with Calcutta leather workers 2001; W-11 ticket; W-11 Tram, Melbourne City Circle Route 2006, photo Frank Strk;
(1.2.3) *W-11 Karachi 2 Melbourne* (first season) tram passengers during Festival Melbourne 2006, the Cultural Festival of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games, photos Karen Trist.

Tram Overheard conversationalists for W-11 Tram: an Art of Journeys (second season) Melbourne summer 2006-2007, clockwise from top left (1) no.20 Mick Douglas and Leela Gandhi; (2) no.5 Neil Thomas and David Wells interacting with passengers Khurram and Ahsan who after revisiting the tram for 3 weeks are invited to become hosts; (4) no.1 Lord Major of Melbourne John So and Wurundjeri elder Aunty Joy Murphy Wandin; (3) no.10 Dur-E Dara and Dalal Smiley; (6) no.3 Rod Quantock and Azhar Usman; (5) no.11 Ann Curthoys and Keith Butler; photos Karen Trist.
Tram Overboard artist-led improvised performance journeys during W.11 Tram: an Art of Journeys (second season)
Tram Overboard artist-led journeys for W-11 Tram: an Art of Journeys (second season) Melbourne summer 2006-2007, clockwise from top left (1) no.12 on Australia Day with boat-people.org and Mrs. B. Wight and Mrs B. Wright of the John Howard Ladies Auxiliary Fan Club; (2) no.14 The Brides Carolyn Connors and Aurora Kurth; (3) no.20 Hi God People and Shoaib Safi; (4) no.8 Shoaib Safi; (5) no.10 Sparkel; photos Karen Trist.
Tram Otherwise passengers and hosts during W-11 Tram: an Art of Journeys (second season)
Tram Otherwise passengers during W-11 Tram: an Art of Journeys (second season)
Top to bottom (1) City District Government Karachi plaque gift from the Naib Nazim (Deputy Mayor) Nasreen Jalil to Mick Douglas, said to be equivalent to “the keys to the city”. 2006; (2) Nusrat Iqbal’s decorator workshop, Karachi 2006, photo Mick Douglas; (3) chamak patti gift from Muhammad Nadeem and Safdar Ali to Mick Douglas, 2006.
overheard
overboard
otherwise
WARNING:

contains and releases potential
<p>| Journey Title: | <strong>LIVEHOUSE</strong> |
| Carriage: | transforming transported cultures |
| <strong>JOURNEY TYPE:</strong> | |
| Duration: | 2008-2010 (ongoing tbc) |
| Motive: | propinquity |
| <strong>Mode Of Mobility:</strong> | heterological |
| <strong>JOURNEY ELEMENTS:</strong> | |
| Infrastructure: | Mode of Transport: international freight. |
| Transport Vehicle: | shipping container. |
| Tools: | vendor-like mobile carts, trolleys, stickers. |
| Social Relations: | Carriage Artist: Mick Douglas |
| Role: | concept, artistic direction. |
| Social model: | ambivalent hospitality |
| Social distribution: | A: estate tenant hosts (5 men, 3 women). B: uni students (60) &amp; estate agencies/groups (8). C: estate residents. D: through-passing public. |
| Institutional Power Players: | City of Melbourne (Community Cultural Development Program) RMIT University Vic. Gov. Office of Housing Carlton Housing Estate Residents Services (CHERS) |
| Tactics: | locating, containing, releasing. enabling, enlivening, enriching. affiliating, activating, demonstrating. tooling, training, prototyping. settling, unsettling, mobilising. participating, improvising, performing. hosting, guesting, inverting. patterning, animating, amplifying. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOURNEY DOCUMENTATION:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Digital Archive:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1901-1973 The Australian Government’s **White Australia policy** intentionally restricts “non-white” immigration to Australia.

1960s – early 70s Victorian Government declared “slum housing” demolished and Carlton Housing Estate 4-storey “walk-up” flats and high rise towers constructed.

1975 **Racial Discrimination Act** is passed by the Australian Parliament, making illegal the use of racial criteria for any official purpose. A social policy of multiculturalism begins to emerge.

2002 Mick Douglas commences relationship with City of Melbourne Community Cultural Development (CCD) Program when invited to be leading local artist collaborating with Paris-based artist Lucy Orta over her month residency commissioned by the City.

Feb 2006 State Government of Victoria announces redevelopment of the Carlton Housing Estate and precinct in a public-private partnership with a commercial property developer—the largest public housing redevelopment undertaken to date.

July 2006 City of Melbourne’s CCD Program initiates a community arts and cultural development project based at the Carlton Public Housing Estate, inspired by the State Governments’ redevelopment announcement.

Sept 2006 Photographer Angela Bailey and writer Helena Spyrou are engaged to work on “The Flats” as commencement of the arts project on the Estate produced by City of Melbourne.

Sept 2007 Mick invited by City of Melbourne (CoM) to discuss a possible project at Carlton Housing Estate.

The Pink Room exhibition/installation held by Angela Bailey and Helena Spyrou in a “walk-up” flat on the Carlton Estate, soon to be demolished for redevelopment.

Office of Housing appoints a Redevelopment Community Development Worker in the Carlton Estate.
GATHERING MOMENTUM

The City of Melbourne local government initiated “a major community arts and cultural development project” based at the Carlton Public Housing Estate in July 2006. It was inspired by the State Government’s announcement in the same year that the entire precinct would be redeveloped making it the largest public housing redevelopment undertaken in the State as a public-private partnership. With issues precipitated by a global financial crisis commencing in 2007, it is not until mid 2009 that the public-private deal is settled and a developer announced. Social housing then joins the shift of services formerly assumed to be provided by the State—public transport and major roads, telecommunications, power and water utility services in Victoria—now being provided in private-public partnerships.

Shifts in social policy on cultural difference unfold concurrently, where the merits and short-fallings of the multiculturalism policy prevailing in Australia since the 1970s become increasingly overlayed with strategies claiming to integrate minority culture communities into the larger society of “Australian values”. Along such lines of advocating social integration, the Government redevelopment of the Estate proposes the intermixing of public and private housing to be progressive social policy.

In spring of 2007 I stopped to enter a “walk-up” flat for an exhibition of photographs and words about tenants’ lives in Carlton called the Pink Room, organised by two artists engaged for the Carlton Flats Arts Project initiated by the City of Melbourne’s Community Cultural Development program. The program staff invited me along to discuss the possibility of me developing a “structure” to advance the project, and perhaps to involve students of my University.

I had a growing working relationship with the Arts and Culture programs and staff of the City of Melbourne in recent years and felt both curious and cautious about the challenges I imagined would be presented by a project premised on the Estate. Could a form of creative criticality be practiced through an arts project situated to straddle both the forces of development under public sector / private enterprise partnership and the forces of local governance? The City of Melbourne arts program and its staff speak in terms of “encouraging active participation in the design and implementation of creative projects” with the “primary purpose […] to strengthen social inclusion and community building through arts practice and community cultural development”.

I have in the past shirked away from the discourse of community cultural development. I observe an often unacknowledged motivation in those who use the discourse to construct a consensual unity amongst people to belong to “a community” with identity, often motivated by its facilitators to counter and oppose a prevailing external force, dominant identity or interest group. Rather than reproduce the simultaneously

---

1 The resulting redevelopment has created some controversy as the private developers have insisted and succeeded in having the newly built private housing units distinctly separated from the new and existing public housing units on the Estate, rather than intermixed as initially proposed by the government.

2 This has included the differing relationships of working as local collaborating artist with French/English artist Lucy Orta during her residency in 2002; receiving funding for the tramjatra project events and publication 2000-05, and for the W-11 Tram second season of 2006-07; and as a member of the Public Art Advisory Committee 2007-2009 and Signal Public Art Commission selection committee.

Feb 2008  Mick articulates “LiveHouse: Moving Life—Housing Live”, a project framework for discussion with City of Melbourne.

March-May 2008  Mick & Jason Parmington lead an industrial design studio course of RMIT undergraduate students to develop a collection of “LiveHouse Vehicles” in collaboration with tenants, exploring mobile ways to activate social activities in the public domain of the Housing Estate.

The 4 storey “walk-up” flats on Drummond St / Rathdowne St of the Carlton Housing Estate are demolished.

June 2008  LiveHouse Vehicles first used by tenants in an estate open-air event, part of the “Big Photo Party”.

Aug-Oct 2008  Mick facilitates a semester of RMIT undergraduate industrial design student placements with Estate agencies and tenant groups as a Design Studies course “Share”. Students offer specific practical assistance to their host, working alongside residents. Students develop visual storyboards that communicate the story of (i) a “thing” important to an estate resident, and (ii) a kind of “making” that an estate resident can do and likes to do.

Aug 2008  Office of Housing permit a standard shipping container being located on the Elgin St Estate to store the LiveHouse Vehicles.

Students’ “Share” visualisations are exhibited and two LiveHouse Vehicles are used at the Office of Housing official afternoon “Housing Week Expo” at the Estate. RMIT Students are the largest attendees with staff of the Office of Housing and local agencies. A gulf of disconnection is evident between the official Government culture and the tenant cultures.

29 Aug 2008  City of Melbourne convene a forum gathering stakeholders to clarify interests in the Carlton Flats Arts Project, and to test and develop the LiveHouse project concept.

Sept 2008  City of Melbourne manages and submits a LiveHouse project funding application to the federal Government’s Australia Council for the Arts, building upon Mick’s LiveHouse project concept outline.

polarising and binding adversarial politics of the underdog “us” vs the oppressive “them” around essentialised identities, I prefer to disturb boundary conditions and have us engage in our mutual entanglement and complicity.

The City of Melbourne’s then current arts policy positioned such a project with an intent to develop “innovative partnership projects between artists, agencies, educational institutions and communities”.

The State Government’s Office of Housing is evidently a necessary “partner”, but just what role it will play, along with that of a yet-to-be-announced private property developer, is uncertain. With my University campus only 1km walk from the estate, I envision learning and research opportunities appropriate for the University’s engagement, such as increasing the permeability of the University to the city neighbouring precincts through research-led teaching; increasing the university’s out-reach and relevant engagement with new migrant communities; enabling undergraduate students opportunity to develop participatory design capabilities through action-learning; and to develop my own interests in socially engaged art and design practices.

Through earlier socially engaged projects I had become accustomed to playing the key conceptualising, creative, social networking and production roles that brought a project into being. By contrast, my work here would be inheriting a significant existing pattern of relationships between the local and state governments and the servicing agencies to the Estate. Joining the project’s Arts Reference Committee reveals troubling dynamics. The existing project artists are assuming defensive positions and presenting aesthetic options to an Office of Housing senior communications staff person granted sign-off authority at a pedantic level of decision-making. The local government arts staff are managing officiously “correct” processes in an attempt to keep their “project partners” at the table. Will it be possible for me to enable an arts project to intervene and produce any creative cultural difference in this setting of bureaucratised processes?

Rather than travelling to encounter the world elsewhere, right here is the world of a cosmopolitan locality. It is part of the 5km urban radius in which I have been spending the majority of my time for some years. So many forces meet in the conjunction of the contemporary moment of this locality: forces locally particular and globally common; individual and collective; informal and institutional; market-based and based on community trust; private and public; privileged and disadvantaged; and so the list goes on. Could an arts project accommodate, amplify and enliven the conjunctions of cultures that have been transported to, and operate within, this locale? If this current state of affairs being acted out at the Carlton Housing Estate were to “speak” in ways otherwise currently unspoken, what might be heard, and by whom? Could an arts project give momentum to creative processes that constitute the making of locality?

---

Dec 2008  City of Melbourne Council elections result in the election of a new Mayor and Deputy Mayor, and a general swing to a predominantly more conservative oriented elected Council.

Feb 2009  No response provided to the request for project funding from Australia Council for the Arts. The project is downscaled to manifest a “prototype” version of the original project intentions, based upon developing a “modified shipping container” as the basis of a physical LiveHouse for installation on the Estate for one summer season. Project is dependant upon the cash budget of City of Melbourne and RMIT University in-kind contribution. Office of Housing permit the project on the Estate.

Dear Container,

I think of you as being mobile, global, generic, ubiquitous and a sign of a system of circulation. You bring so much potential fruitful mobility: the ease with which you are readily transported; the simple physical transformations you could perform between your states of containing potential and opening-up to release potential; the vehicles, trolleys, tools and equipment you could store and release into adjacent areas to activate opportunities for new social encounters and experiences. You could bring to life the contemporary forces underpinning housing reality here: the migration experience; the market forces of private housing now conjoined with the provision of public housing; the relocation of tenants to accommodation around this estate and other during the redevelopment period (and be re-located around the Estate yourself!); the possibilities of people encountering one another with loosened preconceptions in the open outdoor public space of the Estate amongst your hospitality. Indeed you are just one of many tenants: a migrant who lives out the tensions of displacement and placement.

March-May 2009  Mick & Jason Parmington lead a second industrial design studio course of RMIT students in a process to develop both a speculative proposal for an ideal LiveHouse, and a collaborative design for a practical LiveHouse based upon a modified shipping container. The course is undertaken in a temporary arts project room on the estate.

Mick facilitates a second round of RMIT undergraduate industrial design student semester placements with Estate agencies and tenant groups as a Design Studies course “Motion-Emotion”. Students offer practical assistance to their host and work alongside residents. Students develop visual storyboards that compare examples of both their own experiences and tenants’ experiences of (i) ordinary and extra-ordinary movement in life, (ii) emotionally moving things in life, (iii) stillness in life, (iv) change desired for life.

Tenants participate with RMIT design studio students in weekly open workshops hosted by Mick in the temporary Arts Project room on the estate. Workshops develop aspirations, ideas of use and practical plans for a physical “LiveHouse” based upon custom designed modifications to a shipping container.
MOMENT OF DEPARTURE

* * *

LiveHouse: Moving Life—Housing Live
framework for discussion, Mick Douglas, 28 Feb 2008

The LIVE HOUSE project will provide a framework that stimulates and enables Carlton Housing estate stakeholders to take an enlivened engagement in their contemporary housing condition. This framework will be developed in physical, experiential and conceptual dimensions. The creative development, construction and performative use of a physical LIVE HOUSE will be undertaken. A range of experiences, uses and performative actions will be enabled by the physical LIVE HOUSE. The enactment of these human experiences through the physical LIVE HOUSE will correlate with the creative emergence of conceptual tools, ideas, new understandings and new knowledge relevant to different stakeholders and their primary domains of interest.

The project aims to enable the processes of change to be lived by the stakeholder actors in ways that can be shared live with others. In this sense the arts practice-led project will bring to life the tensions, contradictions and differences in this contemporary condition in such a way as to provoke enlivening engagement, new learning and new potential.

The project will aim to stimulate the development of housing estate community cultural practices of creative self-realisation; greater awareness of and understanding of migrant community housing needs; wider community engagement in contemporary issues of public and private sector responsibilities in housing, and individual and collective responsibilities for living together in housing communities; and a participatory audience for art.

The project will employ collaborative multi-artform arts practice as the method of investigation. With a focus on inter-relationships, the project aims to make complex inter-dependent issues accessible through direct engagement that is wholly felt and experientially understood.

The LIVE HOUSE will provide a context of collaborative, creative self-realisation that injects a sense of possibility in the encounter between stakeholders in the public housing setting. The project will operate in a “live” sense: enabling, amplifying, and enriching capacities of expression in the existing practices of living and working through the case study issues of redevelopment. The way in which the project can come to “house” an engagement in the Carlton Housing estate will be creatively reflected upon. Questions of “house”, “home”, “to house”, “housing”, “belonging”, and “inclusion” will be dynamically poised to resonate throughout the project practices so as to provoke ongoing engagement and project development.

* * *
April 2009  Al Jazeera (English) report April 04: Pakistani police say at least 62 bodies have been found inside a sealed shipping container parked near a town close to the country’s border with Afghanistan. The Afghan victims were being smuggled through Pakistan for a better life abroad.

LiveHouse Vehicles used by tenants at an afternoon event on the Estate, part of a funded State Government Harmony Day program.

May 2009  A warped shipping container with side-opening bi-fold doors is sourced in Brisbane, purchased, and trucked to Melbourne. A former repairer of Israeli military tanks is commissioned to straighten the container and make metalwork modifications.

Workshops that Mick hosts with tenants produce a set of principles describing that LiveHouse is:

• led by tenants
• creative resident inter-action
• creative use by community-groups
• open-air open access
• shared space
• welcoming visible, diverse expressions
• a surface for stickers
• creative opportunities for personal and community development
• potential to tour

June 2009  Detail design of the LiveHouse container developed by Jason & Mick. Jason commences fabrication & fit-out.

Victorian State Government announces Australand and St Hilliers as preferred private developer for the mix of 740 private and public apartments on the Carlton Estates as a $260 million project. The project is evidently handled by the Government and Office of Housing as being politically sensitive.
In hindsight, it is curious to note how such a vision, intended to stimulate discussion amongst primary project “stakeholders”, was articulated with such fulsome and repeated “will”. The rhetoric of a promised vision casts a speculative line of potential at some distance from the actual currently grounded real-politik. Perhaps this is why it is received with enthusiasm from the local government arts staff, and with indifference from the state government housing staff. I feel clear that I have articulated a way of operating that can at least enable me to proceed with a sense of purpose and open-ended direction: to operate in a “live” sense, and to “house” a creative engagement in questions, concerns and interests of the Estate. The proposed LiveHouse project is to amplify and animate life into the dynamics at play: to focus and enhance the actual and potential multiple forms of social inter-action on the Estate.

MOVEMENT

Rather than wait for ideal conditions—for funding confirmation or any certain, strategic or planned knowledge of what to do—I propose to simply start work with modest projects to get things moving. I reckon trust needs to be developed and existing social networks need to be explored before following any big ideas. My intent is to enable tenant participation in creative action to begin easily and realistically, for it to grow and to shape the project direction. Rather than set-up talks with tenants about activities to come, I advocate commencing demonstration activities to attract tenants to participate in project activity viable to do now, and in the process, shape what to do later.

The work begins by involving groups of RMIT University students meeting and collaborating with Estate agencies and tenants. One group of students investigates living practices on the estate that involve something to “share”. Another group investigates land-based designed things between the categories of small-scale buildings and transportation vehicles: that is, the strange creative world of mobile homes; transportable buildings; theatre-set designs; nomadic lightweight shelters; disaster relief shelters; caravans; music travelling shows; trade exhibition stands; tents; temporary improvised “slum” dwellings; customised buses trucks and vans; purpose modified shipping containers; and TV media camera and transmission vehicles and vendor carts. The learning experience of students is structured around making a collection of working prototypes of mobile “LiveHouse Vehicles” to be developed and tested with Estate stakeholders and users. Each vehicle is developed to perform one role that could contribute to a collective capacity to enable social gathering in flexible, mobile ways. By testing the interest in, and viability of, different performance functions with tenants, the vehicles are also a fruitful methodological tool for developing the larger project vision.

The Food Vehicle provides a capacity for The Sorghum Sisters social enterprise of African women from the Estate a means to offer food on a mobile basis for events. With strong social rituals amongst women of the Horn of Africa around coffee—and a rising appreciation for it amongst Estate residents—the Coffee Vehicle intends to provide a micro-environment enhancing the social accessibility and appeal of gathering around coffee, and to extend the capacity of the women who currently transport their coffee ceremony equipment in appropriated supermarket trolleys.
Oct 2009  *LiveHouse* **container lands** on the Carlton Estate. A tenant tells Mick “so many agencies come onto the Estate and talk down to people—it makes me **sick**”. Works on the container are completed onsite over 4 weeks.

After the first **OpenHouse** the Project Coordinator’s car is broken into, valuables stolen, and a host-tenant hospitalised after being **assaulted** when investigating the burglary. The distressed Project Coordinator #1 ceases to work on the project and subsequently **resigns**.

First round **host training** of 6 **men** completed.

*LiveHouse* **card 1** distributed around estate informing about **LiveHouse** project.

**LiveHouse** summer season commences:

**OpenHouse** (4-7pm Fridays over 4 weeks)

_**Dear Container,**_

_You tell me that I have a proclivity for fluidity: that it is even in the language that I use, and that it makes you anxious. It’s true that we have embarked on the kind of open-ended development process that amplifies uncertainty and is a challenge to traditional kinds of project management. As an alternative to management based upon control and containment that you are so familiar with, this is a way of working based upon enabling the self-realising potential of unreliable and unpredictable elements. It involves taking risk. It involves working with irritation and some discomfort. I am advocating an art of tactics that realises self-empowerment and self-transformation. It takes an irritating grain of sand to grow a pearl! You present the qualities of being cold and rigid; in control; monitoring your doors for incomings and outgoings. But I also see you afloat at sea, rolling high and low with the prevailing ocean swell, lost from any set context, without fixed bearings. Go on, just float with me!_

Nov-Dec 2009  A mature-aged undergraduate student of Community Development currently on placement at Carlton Estate commences work as **Project Coordinator #2**, as proposed by Mick.

Additional weekly activities commence:

**Open Percussion Workshop**  
(4-6pm Wednesdays over 6 weeks)

**Open Performance**  
(4-7pm Thursdays over 6 weeks)

**MicroMarket**  
(4-7pm Fridays over 6 weeks)

*LiveHouse* **card 2** distributed around estate informing about **Saturday Situation**.
A Communications Vehicle enables flexible audio and visual functions varying from local area “narrow-cast” broadcasting, sound-mixing desk and live video interaction. Many performing artists are amongst the Estate residents. A Performance Vehicle provides an informal and flexible way to focus attention within a social setting based upon the circumstantial needs of event and performance expectations. Other vehicles included an Information Vehicle for visual interactive exhibition purposes, and a Play Vehicle to entice the interaction of children and parents from multiple age and language groups.

The LiveHouse Vehicles prove to “break the ice” and reveal potential for participative creation action on the Estate at a time of uncertain change. From these beginnings new relationships and trust emerge. The Sorghum Sisters cheekily express a desire to run away with the Food Vehicle to work the festival circuit; resident musicians who have been inspired start imagining more elaborate performance opportunities. An idea for an amphitheatre gets re-ignited.

With no sign of additional funding support beyond that of the local government, I advocate that the project continue an exploratory approach to artistic activation on the estate as outlined, but manifest a prototype version of the original project intentions, based upon developing a custom designed and modified shipping container as the basis of a physical LiveHouse at reduced complexity and cost. I reckon that the project needs to enmesh three levels of “structure”: a physical infrastructure; a social structure for enabling engagement and interaction of Estate residents; and spatial-temporal tactics that induce loosely structured experiential conditions in which residents might inhabit alternatives to the dominating regimes of power relations in their lives.

A second phase of student involvement commences. Over two years, around sixty RMIT University undergraduate design students across four courses5 work on the Estate from a ground-floor room on the Estate or in placements. I ask each cohort of culturally diverse students if anyone has ever lived anywhere in housing provided by a government. No one has, along with myself and my collaborating University colleagues. All of us are outsiders to a government Housing Estate, with some students being on exchange from other parts of the world, and so new to Melbourne and Australia. Many of the students experience some anxiety in the face of this unfamiliar real-world setting that challenges their currently accepted worldviews. Simultaneously evident amongst some students is an appreciation for the tangible community-oriented work that culminates in social events on the Estate. What I am teaching these undergraduate students seems to blur between, on the one hand, discipline-specific interests of socially-engaged / participatory design, and on the other, matters as broad-brushed as an ethics of creative life practice in an increasingly cosmopolitan urban condition. One group is again involved in placements with agencies and groups of the Estate, this time gently exploring the relations between motion and emotion in tenants’ experiences and life practices. Another group explore a participatory design process through workshops with tenants to develop the LiveHouse infrastructure in two directions: firstly as an “ideal” version with little constraints, and secondly as a realistic

---

5 Two Design Studio courses involving the development of design proposals, and two Design Studies courses enquiring into the Estate as a context for design activity.
4.00-9.00pm Saturday 12 Dec 2009  A LiveHouse host surprises project participants by appearing at Saturday Situation in a “Santa Claus” costume. A surprising red and white colour correlation is evident between LiveHouse and Santa Claus. A host of Islamic faith expresses his concern at this religious association being made to the secular LiveHouse project. Mediation by Council project staff results in the “Santa Claus” host quitting for the day.

“LiveHouse Saturday Situation event with music, performances, percussion group, micro-market, coffee across cultures, stickering and food. Free, open air and open for all.”

And music from…
“Son Corners” funky reggae, latin & soul
Ruth Rogers-Wright singing jazzy
Joseph Zammit playing pop folk
Fadil Suna group playing folk jazz
“Horn of Africa” playing music of the Horn
LiveHouse percussion group
And a dusk Show of Shadows

18 Dec 2009  Mick facilitates conflict resolution between the two project hosts of differing faiths.

Project Coordinator #2 in ill-health.

Second Round host training of 3 women completed.

3:41pm 23 Dec 2009  CoM email advises Mick that his proposal to seek external funding for LiveHouse gaining independence beyond 2010 is not supported, and that CoM wish to investigate other uses for the LiveHouse container.
version based upon modifying a shipping-container.

Through these weekly open-door workshops with tenants over three months a set of principles for LiveHouse are developed, articulating that LiveHouse is led by tenants; is focused upon creative resident inter-action; is for creative use by community-groups; offers open-air open access to a shared space; welcomes visible, diverse expressions; is a surface for stickers; is a creative opportunity for personal and community development; and has potential to tour as a creative expression beyond Carlton.

Shipping containers have gained increased international visibility in recent decades for multiple non-intended purposes: examples varying from being building-blocks for architect-designed environments of kudos and curiosity amongst the global upwardly-mobile social classes, to producing the suffocated corpses of asylum-seeking people being smuggled as international cargo. Can a LiveHouse custom modified shipping-container gather and release these contrasting realities, standing as a mobile amplifier of contemporary global uncertainty? Might the international code of lighthouses provide a clue: a red and white visual language of the landscape and seascape that assists way-finding? Can this harsh militaristic aesthetic of cold steel-shell be softened with patterned perforations allowing light and shadow? Can an enclosure be simply and powerfully able to perform an unsuspecting conversion to an opening that is hospitable and inviting?

The day that the LiveHouse container landed onto a grassy patch on the Estate a tenant asked me “What is this? What is it for? Who is doing this?” He expressed how so many people from agencies come onto the Estate and talk down to people: “It makes me sick”.

My attention rises with his welcome provocation. I respond: “I’m an artist and work for RMIT University. This LiveHouse project doesn’t ask anything from you or tell you anything in particular. It’s just an opportunity for you to do something creative that you want to do; it’s a space where you can meet other people and just hang-out together.” He and I are well aware that I am just another outsider.

I continue, trying to say it how it is: “Some tenants worked with Uni students last year to make LiveHouse Vehicles—like mobile vendor carts for coffee, cooking and making performance—that have since been used by residents at get-togethers. Some tenants have been meeting over the last 9 months developing the ideas that have led to this container here. Some of them are also choosing to become “hosts” of LiveHouse. You could too. People are talking about making music here, performing, having a market and trading stuff, having workshops and doing things open to the public.”

My new acquaintance jibes to his friend and I: “we should get all the poofers down and put on a drag show!” I urged him to do so! Whenever I saw that tenant again he would avoid engagement. As in any social setting, there are issues, difficult daily realities and preferences being lived out by many tenants of the Estate that make the taking of responsibility, the functioning in socially reliable ways, and the dedication of personal time to uncertain activities, something that cannot be taken for granted. The 1950s and 60s wave of southern and eastern European migrants to Melbourne were able to live and work in the inner northern areas like Carlton (including the Estate
Jan 2010  Project Coordinator #2 investigates a film-screening program that meets unsurpassable obstacles. **Project Coordinator #2 resigns** with ill-health, in addition to stating being ill-equipped to work with the professional differences of orientation between CoM as employer and Mick / RMIT as on-the-ground collaborator. Without the Coordinator, CoM propose to cancel the remainder of the project.

Mick’s proposal for the current part-time estate redevelopment Community Worker to commence complimentary part-time work as **Project Coordinator #3** is accepted by CoM.

A LiveHouse tenant host (and active member of Estate committees) articulates a vision for a ground level “cosmopolitan precinct” featuring tenant-run enterprises that could be developed on the Estate in the unused undercroft spaces of the high-rise towers.

Feb-March 2010  New weekly gatherings commence:

- **theatre-making workshops** and **micro-market** 7-9pm (5 gatherings Fridays 7-9pm) led by Mammad Aidani, Claudia Estobar & Mick Douglas.

- **Video Stories workshops** with Horn of African women and Estate children (4 workshops Fridays 1-5pm) led by filmmaker Amie Batalibasi.

Dear Container,

It is strange that you seem to be prohibited in taking your life developed in Carlton with you beyond Carlton. I figured that landing in Carlton would change you; that you’d carry traces of the experience in Carlton with you when you moved on; that Carlton tenants would share what they made of you—and made of themselves—to other people and places beyond Carlton. Your ambiguity and independence in the current suite of power relations around the Estate is what has been able to attract the interests of your hosts and tenant participants. You have been an expression of possibility. So why surrender to the containing impulse? Isn’t it a form of patronising bad faith to, on the one hand, offer self-transformational potential to people, and on the other hand, exercise power to limit and control this potential? Shouldn’t our work be enabling cultural potential to continue to grow with increasingly independent and self-enabled power?
built in 1960s and 70s) at a time of disrepair of its late 1800s / early 1900s building stock and the commensurate relatively accessible property market. This presented entrepreneurial opportunities in the local area that new migrants seized upon, especially the Italians in Carlton. The more recent wave of new migrant communities residing in Carlton, significantly from the Horn of Africa, find that such entrepreneurial opportunities are beyond their reach in Carlton and can only be pursued in areas more economically accessible that are further away from the inner-city.

The project gains clarity: *LiveHouse is an arts platform of creative inter-action of residents of the Carlton Housing Estate at the corner of Drummond and Palmerston Streets over summer 2009-2010.* With physical infrastructure in place, a self-selecting core group of young adult tenants are trained as “hosts” to lead creative social activities and events with *LiveHouse*. Activities commence slowly based on realistic capabilities to host them and attract interest from other tenants. A weekly *open house* enables people to experience what the project could be. This soon evolves into a weekly program of late afternoon / early evening events including an *open percussion workshop*, an *open performance* and *micro-market* with hosts making popcorn and tenants bringing Ethiopian coffee and garments to sell. An intensive end-of-year celebration combines all activities in a “Saturday Situation” event. The new-year brings a new program of weekly *video workshops* and *theatre-making workshops* alongside the continuing weekly *micro-market*. The activities slowly attract increasing participation of tenants and new conversations emerge. Some of the *LiveHouse* tenant hosts are also engaged in the State Government Estate redevelopment consultative committee. They actively discuss their own vision for how the Estate development could include a “cosmopolitan precinct” of shops, restaurants and local trading in its under-croft areas enabling active tenant involvement, and opening up the Estate to external visitors and to a larger economy.6

**MOMENTUM**

Drawing close to dusk, numerous voices of the Estate gather their reflections7:

*LiveHouse provided opportunity to show and encourage others to participate, to learn more of other people in the estate, and to gain people skills and confidence.* — tenant host.

*I never knew people other than people from my country. LiveHouse brought all the people together. The community feel it’s part of LiveHouse cuz no one is special. It brought a new life into Carlton. It made us feel like one family with all of the different people in Carlton.* — tenant host.

---

6 Estate resident and *LiveHouse* host Daniel Rechter has been the primary proponent of this idea.
March 2010  CoM reiterate via letter to Estate tenants, agencies and stakeholders that the CoM produced **Carlton Flats Arts Project is completed**, including LiveHouse, and the LiveHouse container will depart the estate.

*LiveHouse card 3* distributed around estate informing about the upcoming “LiveHouse Lights-Out” event.

Two tenant hosts develop ideas for a mobile African coffee ceremony cart to service the public areas of the Estate as an entrepreneurial opportunity after LiveHouse has departed.

7.00-9.00pm Friday 12 March 2010  “Join LiveHouse tenant hosts and estate residents for **LiveHouse LIGHTS-OUT**—an event involving word, song and shadowplay, resident video stories, coffee ceremony, micro-market stalls and you. The LiveHouse project has involved estate tenants developing and hosting an open-air platform enlivening the potential of creative inter-action to estate residents.”

Event opened by City of Melbourne Councilor Jennifer Kanis & Professor Tony Dalton, Pro Vice-Chancellor Design and Social Context, RMIT University.

18 March 2010  State Government funded “Harmony Day” event organised by estate agencies uses LiveHouse as focal hub.

23 March 2010  **LiveHouse container transported** from Carlton Estate and stored in CoM carpark in Southbank.

Friday 26 March 2010  Hosts assemble on the **dead-grass trace** of the LiveHouse container’s footprint and move on to an estate common room for dinner and a reflective discussion about the LiveHouse project.

3 May 2010  Mick provides a 37-page LiveHouse project **Artistic Report** to CoM.

contents:
Summary & Recommendations
Project scope
The field of socially-engaged arts research
Artistic process and methodology
Review of project activities
Reflections of the project coordinator
Project significance
Project value and integrity
The future
… appendix …
Alternative scenarios for the future
Project management & roles
Project documentation
Project asset list
LiveHouse container
I was inspired by this LiveHouse project. [...] Now I know there is more musician in the area, and other artists [...] I was also very encouraged and pleased to see women from Islamic tradition background actively involved in this LiveHouse project, and interacting with people from other faith. — tenant & musician

The LiveHouse project changed the sense of what is possible here on the Carlton housing estate. It’s rare around here that we have the opportunity to make choices. The result of that seems to be a community de-skilled in this regard. We want everything but are resigned to getting nothing at all. LiveHouse broke down that polarised position by giving us a chance to engage with the complex reality of bringing our hopes to fruition. It also brought together a great bunch of people, who live on and around the estate, but had never had a chance to meet. I’ve lived here for over 10 years, and I’d never seen anything like this on the estate before. — tenant host.

[...] as few doors, walls and other physical and perceived barriers as possible, make the Live House project easy to encourage transparent, safe, social interaction. The energy that Live House involvement has fostered is palpable, with the host team in particular, and has increased the capacity and social awareness on the estate. — Community Worker

The community loves the LiveHouse and regard it as part of the estate. It was with a lot of sadness they saw it leave the place—it is rejuvenating the place and the community, and provides a sense of belonging, initiative, social connectedness and arts and health [...] . — staff member, North Yarra Community Health

The LiveHouse provided a central meeting place on the estate ...for all community members. Feedback to me was that the space was enjoyed by many community members. [LiveHouse’s strength was] bringing together diverse sections of the Carlton community. A project such as this is worth the logistical problems of setting up because it makes real inroads into community connections. — staff member, Carlton Primary School

[...] the process and outcomes were good for the estate community. The programs seemed to be growing in popularity and a sense of community was established among those involved. I hope it returns or something similar, as a site for tenant art/theatre/music is badly needed on the estate. — staff member, Church of All Nations

By integrating the creative use of infrastructure, the building of social rapport and creative capabilities, and the tactical punctuation of space and of time in the public domain life on the Estate, the project began to articulate unique forms of artistic expression. Such a process takes time to authentically emerge from its setting and to mature. The summer season of 2009-2010 successfully began this process, but
18 May 2010  City of Melbourne develops a new draft Arts Strategy. The Community Cultural Development Program is renamed the Arts and Participation Program.

Mick distributes the summary *Artistic Report Recommendation* to all project stakeholders including Office of Housing staff, the Victorian Government Minister for Housing, all agencies on the Estate and the LiveHouse hosts.

1. That project producers and partners work collaboratively to enable the undertaking of one additional summer season of the LiveHouse project over 2010-2011 on the Estate, acknowledging that this would NOT be financially supported by the City of Melbourne.

2. That a new independent and tenant-led Incorporated Association be purposefully formed by tenant hosts and core tenant participants of LiveHouse to assume ownership and management of LiveHouse, under the guidance of the Redevelopment Community Worker, with relationship to, but autonomy from, the Carlton Housing Estate Residents Association (CHERS).

3. That the Office of Housing and the Victorian Government’s Minister for Housing consider offering a one-off financial grant to this Incorporated Association to support the independent operational costs of a LiveHouse summer season over 2010-2011.

4. That this tenant-led Incorporated Association operate under the auspice of a third party arts organisation (such as the project’s current auspicing body) under which operational liability insurances are covered, and budget administration services are provided.

5. That this Incorporated Association be free to decide whether to engage the artistic direction and project facilitation services of Mick Douglas / RMIT University or others.

6. That the LiveHouse container be decommissioned at the end of this season in March 2011, at the time when the landscaping “associated works” of the Estate Redevelopment may have commenced.

7. That if after reasonable consideration the above recommendations prove unviable by 31 July 2010, alternative uses of the LiveHouse container or its decommissioning should be pursued by City of Melbourne in a manner that preserves the integrity of the project and that of its producers, partners and participants, and respects the moral rights of the project artist.
has not been able to achieve a wide diffusion of quality social interaction or the maturing of artistic quality that the project to date demonstrates as its potential. The local government funding for the project has run its course. A profound tiredness and a surrender to the greater machinations of alienating processes seems to slowly permeate many individuals working in such a setting of complex and often contradictory forces. It seems that sustaining oneself in the setting is commonly achieved by influencing and adhering to the institutionalisation of processes. What is my role in this situation, and my potential to contribute to it?

A constituency of tenants who have been active in LiveHouse as hosts and participants has been established. I articulate an artistic report with recommendations and circulate it widely to the project stakeholders, advocating that the value of the project work to date would rise exponentially with one further summer season of LiveHouse on the Estate. These governmental stakeholders like to communicate through bullet points, so I shoot a few about what the project has provided:

- **Increased opportunities for the diverse tenants of the Estate to encounter one another, beyond dominant established groupings, in an openly hospitable, tenant-led and obligation-free setting unprecedented on the Estate.**

- **Opportunities for community-minded tenants to develop skills, experience and creative capabilities that are both generated by and returned to their lived environment.**

- **Public demonstration of tenant-led creative interaction and the effects this has on individual and collective perceptions of self-worth, self-potential and capacity for self-transformation.**

- **Positive focus for tenants to contribute to creating change in their lives and their lived environment during the period of estate redevelopment when tenants are experiencing significant changes over which they have little influence.**

I seek to productively channel the tensions of difference through stimulating discussion of notions of artistic integrity of the project. I advocate this project’s integrity being understood as the forward momentum it makes evident. Two examples are pertinent in this case. Firstly, the tenant hosts’ demonstrated level of custodianship and responsibility for the project whilst residents’ engagement with the project steadily increased. This was made possible by generating trust, and demonstrating that “talk” is reliably put to “action”. Secondly, the aesthetic qualities of the project being uniquely self-generated by processes that tenants regard themselves to be intrinsically part of having created. Tenants became steadily keen to invest more energy into the creative roles that were generating their experience of what LiveHouse “is” and could be. The artistic impetus and affordance—or momentum—invested in the project re-circulates as “feedback” into the project, propelling an idiosyncratic connective spirit forth. This is both an enigmatic ingredient, yet also a
Dear Container,

You value your generic qualities as an element of infrastructure, and it is clear that others value this in you. But remember that you have come this far in our recent journey because of your relationship with your new friends, your hosts, and the experiences you have developed together in Carlton. Your value is more than being a physical asset. A far greater value is the social capital that you have stimulated in your port of call in Carlton, to which you are now its carriage. You are at a juncture yet again: provoked to negotiate your impulses to contain or to release. C’mon, let go of your possessive territorial power and control! Your life is an entanglement of infrastructure and evolving social structure. Prohibiting the emergence of your self-realising social potential would be a gesture that leaves economies of hierarchy, deception and mistrust standing firmly in its wake. Surely you do not want to enact a position of cultural gatekeeper! Listen: can you hear the cry for self-determination? Let’s celebrate the re-distribution of power and the increased trust that we have created together. There is much cultural credibility to be gained (even amongst your fellow containers!) if you recognise the important enabling role you have played and forego that impulse to “control and contain”. Your mobility has been re-invested with such new potential here in Carlton. Now you are going, but as tenants have said, it seems that we only just started. We will miss you. Do take something of Carlton with you!

Bon voyage!

July 2010  Mick suggests CoM throw a tarpaulin cover over the LiveHouse container whilst it sits in a carpark over winter.

The Minister for Housing requests further information about the Artistic Report Recommendations and the funding required.

LiveHouse hosts and estate tenants discuss the Artistic Report Recommendations and formulate a request to the Minister for Housing and the Office of Housing for a financial grant to support to undertake a LiveHouse summer season 2010-2011.

August 2010  Government Elections are scheduled for later in the year at both the National and the State of Victoria levels of government. The Federal seat of Melbourne (including the Carlton Estate area) has been an Australian Labor Party stronghold seat for more than a decade, but is now well known to be a marginal seat with strong potential to become a Federal Seat held by the Greens Party. By chance Mick meets the campaigning Minister for Housing out the front of a local supermarket and puts in a word of support for Carlton Estate tenants request to him for funding a second LiveHouse summer season.

An RMIT University landscape architecture student and an interior design student who are undertaking their graduating projects commence working with Mick and former LiveHouse hosts and Estate tenants to develop alternative visions for the Estate ground-level public domain and shared access areas springing from tenant’s idea of a “cosmopolitan precinct” that could foster social enterprise opportunities.
perceivable form of creative social agency when compared to the established interests of organisational agencies and prevailing social relations of Estate life. Only as a consequence of the forestated examples of momentum is a third possible. Further artistic expressions have the potential to emerge, become uniquely refined and enriched in their aesthetic power, and be so compelling as to inspire their carriage amongst people and places beyond the Carlton setting. Will this opportunity be afforded?
LiveHouse container transported to Carlton Housing Estate, Melbourne October 2009, photo Mick Douglas.
LiveHouse Vehicles developed by RMIT University design students in a course led by Mick Douglas & Jason Parmington, used at the Big Photo Party at Carlton Housing Estate, Melbourne June 2008, Clockwise from top left (1) performance vehicle, Kei Kai, Kay Fung, Austin Hall, Tsui Yuk Fai; (2) coffee vehicle, Ghill de Rozario, Amanda Kwok, Isabel Prochner; (3) food vehicle and (5) food vehicle drawing, Stephen Auchette, Matt Browne, Jason Wylie; (4) information vehicle, Darren Lewis, Luke Palmer, Matt Toebelmann.
LiveHouse container as a surface for stickering, Carlton Housing Estate, Melbourne summer 2009-2010. Clockwise from top left (1, 2) photos Angela Bailey. (3, 4) photos Mick Douglas; (5) LiveHouse sketch, Mick Douglas.
LiveHouse summer 2009-2010 at Carlton Housing Estate, Melbourne.
Clockwise from top left (1, 5) micromarket; (2, 3, 6, 7) open house; (8) open percussion workshop;
(4) LiveHouse tenant host training session; photos LiveHouse tenant hosts.
LiveHouse open house, Carlton Housing Estate, Melbourne summer 2009-2010, photo tenant host.
Horn of Africa coffee ceremony at LiveHouse Saturday Situation, Carlton Housing Estate, Melbourne 12 December 2009, photo Rob Blackburn.
LiveHouse LightsOut, Carlton Housing Estate, Melbourne Friday 12 March 2010, photo Angela Bailey.
LiveHouse LightsOut, Carlton Housing Estate, Melbourne Friday 12 March 2010, photo Jacob Walker.
LiveHouse LightsOut, Carlton Housing Estate, Melbourne Friday 12 March 2010, photo Rob Blackburn.
Carlton Housing Estate site after the departure of the LiveHouse container, March 2010, Mick Douglas.
Pakistani police say at least 62 bodies have been found inside a sealed shipping container parked near a town close to the country's border with Afghanistan. The Afghan victims were being smuggled through Pakistan for a better life abroad. – Al Jazeera English, April 04, 2009.

It's live and open—anyone can come. – tenant host.
PASSAGES
Tracing *tramjatra*: toward a participatory aesthetic politics

A method of mobility

We are walking the streets late at night along lines of steel inscribed into Melbourne and Kolkata, two cities with tracks of a shared past. The last trams of the night are bunkered in their depots. There are many night hours before the lingering sound of metal wheels on metal track will again usher in the day.

In the late 1990s at a time of threatened demise of Calcutta’s tramways and the privatisation and automation of Melbourne’s tramways, a friendship began to develop between artists, activists and members of tramways communities of Melbourne and Kolkata (formerly Calcutta). Interest gathered in taking artistic actions in the urban fabric of these two former British colonial cities to explore the current role and potential value of tramways to their contexts. The friendship rolled into an open-ended creative project adopting the title *Tramjatra: Imagining Melbourne & Kolkata by Tramways*. We are now walking and talking the tracks of these cities to trace this *tramjatra* project in an experimental effort toward a form of participatory aesthetic politics.

“*Tramjatra?*” you ask. It is a conjunction of the English “tram” with the Bengali “jatra”—translating as *trip* or *journey*, but also the name of a pre-colonial Bengali folk form of travelling open-air theatre. So “*tramjatra*”: *journey by tram*. Whilst tramways are the immediate matter of concern, the project engages more expansively to employ tramways as a medium to situate a dialogue amongst the contemporary conditions and contingencies that such a project inhabits: increased global connectedness and opportunity for inter-cultural exchange; differences between urban conditions and modes of urban inhabitation; cultures of
participatory creative practice operating both aesthetically and politically; and the backdrop of global warming and challenges of social and ecological sustainability.

Participants and passengers have been transported in and between the two cities, actually and imaginatively. The project activities have been multi-layered, with irregular pattern spanning over a decade, and with intensive periods akin to a festival. The tramjatra has included interactive performative gestures with tram passengers and workers that build upon the role of tram conductors; the making of temporary physical installation artworks of trams and tramways infrastructure; the hosting of forums and public discussions; the making of exhibitions, short films, a website, a daily newspaper column, freely distributed printed tickets and papers and a book\(^1\) co-published in both nations of the same “tramjatra” title. This list of manifested things of tramjatra—as if souvenir images offered to the passing tourist—conveys points for a quick mental map of the project’s scope. I refer to this convention of representing project outcomes in order to depart from its limitations and demonstrate a method of mobility through which such a project is operating and can be traced.

The tramjatra project has been—and is—an ongoing process of making passage: of making opportunity for creatively working through the implications and possibilities of relations. Along the way the journey makes a form of experimental comparativism that attempts to live out a form of what Arun Appadurai calls “globalisation from below”.\(^2\) Now, after more than ten years of relationship, various tramjatra project participants step out of the tram in both cities to walk, tracing the tracks of our journeys together through the practice of making another journey, this time on foot. We trace over the heterogenous ways the tramjatra has travelled, made passage and given carriage, been transportative and in some ways been transformative.

The effort of this writing, and of this present experiment in night walking and talking, is to side-step any perceived necessity to adopt a critical distance. Together with project collaborators, I speak and act from an embedded position within the tracks of tramjatra. By situating our collaborative practice in the act of tracing the tracks of tramjatra, we are reiterating and extending a method of mobility that attempts to

---


enact a creative criticality. A three-fold operation is underway: tracing our past and present conduct; embodying our engagement in the material realism of interest to us across the two cities; and making headway toward the future potential of the project. The mobility at play in this practice can be traced forth through the situating devices of movements, moments and momentum.

Movements

gesturing movement
By day, tram after tram choreograph a beat to the movement of the metropolis. For now the destination signs at the front of tramcars have their intent laid to rest with the night. I’ve fitted a loop of yellow light-reflective-tape around both your wrists, a kind of friendship bracelet echoing the hand-forged iron bracelets that Kolkatan social activist Sanjay Mitra had presented to fifteen Melbournian and Kolkatan tramjatra collaborators back in 2001. I offer you a yellow reflective stick to walk with. The wrists of others walking ahead are glowing under night-lights as our arms swing back and forth, dragging, drawing and playing with the sticks that readily inhabit the groove of the parallel tram-tracks. Like a needle amplifying the grooves of a vinyl sound recording, my stick jumps tracks back and forth between three experimental walks undertaken in the two cities over December 2008 and January 2009.

The gesture of tracing tramjatra changed and developed over the walks. The first walk in Melbourne involved clamping copies of the tramjatra book at the base of sticks and dragging them through the tram-tracks whilst walking and talking, leaving a trace of the event in the remains of erased books. In Kolkata of late January, the Saraswati Puja—celebrating the Hindu goddess of knowledge, learning, arts and wisdom—reminds us that the erasure of a book as an object of knowledge would likely provoke concerns that are irrelevant to the interests of tracing tramjatra. So the first Kolkata walk utilised sticks with a patch of golden jute fabric attached along its length like a downward pointing flag (Kolkata having been established by the British as a base of jute production just as Melbourne was built by regional gold discoveries). When approaching Esplanade terminus it occurs to us that this “flag” could be misconstrued as a gesture affiliated with the Hindu nationalist BJP political party. And so it emerged that a yellow reflective stick and arm bracelets for participants are clear gestural tools in both cultural contexts.
In the tracks of Victoria Parade I’m transported to that situation in a broken-down Melbourne tram conversing with Ashis Nandy, hearing his line on cricket being an Indian game that the British happened to have invented. Could it be that tramways are a postcolonial transport that the British happened to have stitched into their colonial cities? In that motionless tram the grind of time’s march stands still whilst the peak hour world continues its orbit. A time expansive and extensive opens up, a reminder of a world made spatially, not simply by a narrative sequence of events. Tramways have a non-linear operational logic of urban-scaled returns, travelling over the same ground day-in day-out, cutting a differently patterned path to the expansionist logic of modernity and the globally prevailing individualisation of late capitalism. The early-industrial form of tramways reaches to our current post-industrial global context with renewed relevance. Tramways, now also called light-rail, deliver mobility in high-density urban living patterns, have relatively low-polluting environmental impacts and a capacity to foster social relations. This is why, after the closure of most tramways systems around the world in the 1950s and 60s with the rise of the automobile and oil industries, there is the current re-investment in tramways and light-rail systems around the world.

Assuming the combined roles of the organiser/curator, one of the artists and a conductor of this project tramjatra, I walk and talk a network of lines in these cities to weave the project’s conditions of possibility. I seek to induce the potential for movement, slippage and play between aesthetic concerns of art and political concerns of activism. As a Melbourne-based artist and academic I locate my efforts as a socially-engaged art practice concerned with the cultural articulation of sustainable mobility and participatory aesthetic experience. My work in the project involves, firstly, fostering a networked platform of social relationships across the two cities and their cultures. Through these relationships the project opens up potential for engaging in contemporary urban mobility, particularly through acts that explore the broader resonances, purposes and aspirations associated with mobility socially and subjectively.

Lines, like tracks, can place us on fixed routes, carry us by habit, and deliver us to stereotypes, received myths, worn-out positions and false identities. There is a way of speaking officially in broad daylight about

---

3 This took place as part of different tram-based arts project I hosted in Melbourne: W-11 Tram, an art of journeys. See project documentation at <http://www.tramtactic.net/W-11/2006/12/departure_7_ashis_nandy_don_mi.html>
matters of international cultural exchange where a discourse of interests and legitimacy is commonly in question. The night can open up other ways of speech, silence and action; other paths of engagement where urban inhabitants operate unconsciously as much as consciously. It would be a conceit for an arts project concerned with the inter-connected play of relations to claim to speak singularly in the light of day. There is more than one line: there are plural tramjatras. Parallel, criss-crossed and contradictory forces propel movement. As Edward Said has taught, there is much to learn from a contrapuntal approach where a complex musicality of sorts emerges in the comparitivism of multiple threaded voices. It is the weave of lines that makes a net-work, the weave of strands populated by relations that tends to the binds and strains of aesthetic and political entanglement.

**gathering movement**

“Tramjatra is the name not just of a book, but of a movement”, says Sukanta Chaudhuri from his reading of the *tramjatra* book. A dialogue first commenced between Kolkata biological scientist and activist Debasish Bhattacharrya, former Melbourne tram conductor and now performer Roberto D’Andrea, and myself, Mick Douglas. We are soon joined by other Kolkatans—filmmaker Mahadeb Shi and scientist and journalist Jayanta Basu. The dialogue and friendship emerging between us gains shape with our differing concerns and capabilities given focused expression through undertaking practical collaborative actions. Many other Kolkatans and Melbournians join us as active fellow participants or passengers, some making their own tram *jatra*—like Paromita Roy who can’t find the proper *tramjatra* exhibition tram to catch in Kolkata but undertakes a tram-journey nevertheless, one that moves her to write to the Statesman newspaper about her being transported.

“The strength of tramjatra” says Mahadeb Shi, “lies in its collective effort”. He identifies two concerns: “One is the tramway as an art subject, like a tram-space. The other is tram as a pollution-free, environmentally friendly mode of transport”. The dialogical relation of art and activism

---


6 This was published in Suzie Attiwill, “One’s Own Tram-jatra”, *The Statesman*, 14 March 2001, Kolkata. p. 3.

7 Douglas (ed), op cit. p. 28.
I suggest. Embedded in the tracks of the project are a further series of dialogical relations: clearly the inter-city, inter-cultural Australia-India relation. But most simple and powerful is the relation between two individuals encountering one another and the collective social potential this relation carries when multiplied. Through situating encounters in this multi-tiered dialogical structure tramjatra generates movement in the relation between tramways systems and cities, domains of knowledge and cultural practices, and between subjectivities in order to make our way of a journey.

On the street Roberto D’Andrea pulls a handful of tickets from his leather Tramtactic conductor’s bag. A flurry of gestures is made as words flicker in multiple languages. Tickets are exchanged with strangers met on track. Multiple layers of fictional tickets have been employed throughout tramjatra as devices to situate social and conceptual encounters with opportunities for movement. For each period of activity in either city, a set of event tickets have been employed as devices to encounter passengers face-to-face and hand-to-hand. I presented an open-ended set of initial themes to participants and passengers in the form of six curatorial tickets. After conversations with the key project participants about to commence intensive tramjatra activities of 2001, I issued a set of participant tickets. These curatorial and participant tickets each articulate a particular point of departure as an intersection of two themes, and a zone of travel in the form of an open-ended question commencing with the words “what if…?”

The participant ticket I develop in dialogue with and issue to Kolkata painter Jayashee Chakravarty reads: Point of Departure: “feel / touch”; Zone of Travel: “what if we could map an imaginary resonance between Melbourne and Kolkata by tram-ways?” When I invite participating artists to make their own “artist ticket” as a gesture of creative self-authorisation, Jayashree produces a thumb-print on either end of the paper ticket face, pointing to and inscribing the event of encounter between two embodied individuals. Her ticket presents a trace of this ritual exchange-event and alludes to the aesthetic and political potential of particular encounters: one with an other. The socially established form of a ticket affords the expectation of a future right: to enter and proceed, to travel and to attain an agreed outcome according to its symbolic exchange value. The various tramjatra tickets appropriate the ticket as a social form, empty it of any future guarantee, and intensify its potential as a situational performance tool that entices the senses toward the value of journeying via encounters in the lived present.
multiplicity of movement

On our first visit to Kolkata Roberto and I end up sleeping for a few hours overnight in a tram stationed at the Belgatchia depot while we are trying to complete transformation of the tram into an installation artwork for the following day’s Ministerial flag-off ceremony. The beginnings of a Melbourne-Calcutta tramways friendship feels strangely rich for us. Go on, call it exotic, perhaps just as the Kolkatans experienced their first moments in Melbourne. I’ve brought newly acquired snippets of curious discovery with me from Melbourne: that it was Australian horses that pulled the pre-electrified Calcutta Trams; that the first shipment of convicts to the Melbourne region arrived on the British cargo vessel *HMS Calcutta*; that both cities were the former capitals of their respective nations and regarded by the British as the jewels in the imperial crown; that both cities have prided themselves on being national centres for the arts; and both are the only cities in their nations to have retained the continuous operation of tramways. Roberto and I trace the corner of Spring Street turning into Bourke Street out front of the Victorian State Government’s parliament building. Roberto is reciting the occasion he discovered that Kolkata’s trams share with the Melbourne W-class trams the English-made controller unit and the “ding ding” of the foot-operated bell.

We note that Melbourne precedes Kolkata in the title “imagining Melbourne and Kolkata by tramways”. The curatorial impetus, much of the organisational framework and aspiration of the project to date has indeed been initiated at the Melbourne end of the journey, so to speak. All the financial support for *tramjatra* has come from three levels of Government arts and transport funding in Australian, with formal approval and in-kind support from Kolkata. Of course the policy behind the funding from Australia seeks advantage to its interests. Arts projects that are
government supported, like tramjatra, have to navigate the effects that accepting such official funding might entail. For this project, the building of five funding stakeholders, rather than simply one, placed the project in good stead to maintain its own platform and directional integrity in the grassroots relations of a tramways friendship.8

Sukanta Chaudhuri cites two factors behind the decline of tramways in Kolkata: firstly the “glaring inadequacies of public transport” that are feeding that “basic feature of global consumerism” that has the moderately affluent desire a car of one’s own; and secondly the “failure of Kolkata’s fabled intellectuals to take a firm stand on this as on most other concrete civic issues”. Sukanta continues:

Quite understandably, the Tramjatra movement does not go into these matters. Had it done so, it would not have won the formal if non-committal support of the West Bengal Government, or perhaps the Victorian Government either. The proponents of the Movement have chosen a more graceful and deep-searching path.9

You might have heard another Bengali voice utter that word “corruption”, said with shimmers of accusation, care, despair and shame. Jayanta Basu speaks up: “knowing how to work in a struggling condition, that is a part of activism I learnt from this project”.10 Debasish, whose initial campaign letter seeking support to retain Calcutta Tramways came to my attention, softly adds: “tramjatra asks people to be more conscious about their environment, their quality of life, their living, the safety of the city, the beauty of the city itself, the signature of the city”.11

I imagine Sukanta walking alongside Australian exhibition designer/curator Suzie Attiwill, one of the two ticketed critical passengers whose role during a key passage of tramjatra events was to collect and re-present the project. Suzie sought to shift discussions away from the “saving” of trams for the various said reasons or for nostalgic sentiments. The Australian Broadcasting Commission’s South Asia journalist of the time Edmond Roy had already mischievously proposed the project had saved Kolkata’s trams in his ABC television reportage of 1997.12

---

8 I founded a non-incorporated association in Melbourne called tramtactic to receive funding for managing the tramjatra project and other tramways-based arts projects. These projects are documented at <www.tramtactic.net>

9 Chaudhuri, op cit. p. 35.


11 Ibid. p. 20.

12 Edmond Roy made two mischievous “postcard” reports on the project for Foreign
Suzie writes in one of the *tramjatra* newspaper columns that appeared daily in Kolkata’s Statesman for five weeks:

> there are other more compelling reasons for imagining by tram-ways and what it offers up to thinking about what cities are composed of and what qualities cities of the future should have. Trams are unique spaces within a city.\(^\text{13}\)

Yes, *tramjatra* has, continues Sukanta:

> seized on the neglected truth that an urban transport system is not simply a mechanical means of ferrying citizens from Point A to Point B. It is a social construct, a means of urban bonding and a catalyst—if not an active ingredient—in the cultural life of the community.\(^\text{14}\)

Bruce Wearne, social theorist of Melbourne, paces up alongside to make the point:

> Public movement is political, economic, aesthetic and purposive. Public movement gives evidence of the way societal power is used to shape the life of the citizenry; gives expression to how we make use of personal and collective resources in terms of norms for stewardly use of resources; demonstrates the formation of an aesthetic fabric and life-style; and gives expression to how people view purposive behaviour and how they understand themselves as moving.\(^\text{15}\)

---


\(^\text{14}\) Chaudhuri, op cit. p. 35.

\(^\text{15}\) Bruce C. Wearne, “Ticket and Travel”, in Douglas (ed), op cit. p. 214.
Moments

*uncanny moments*

*Tramjatra* may well be thought of as a movement, as Sukanta Chaudhuri proposes. However reducing struggles of aesthetic and political concerns to the end goals, organisational arrangements and historical impacts of *movements* neglects what John Berger calls the “incidental movements” in his book *Hold Everything Dear*:

> [...] the promises of the incidental movements are instantaneous. Such movements include, life-enhancingly or tragically, experiences of freedom in action. (Freedom without actions does not exist.) Such moments—as no historical “outcome” can ever be—are transcendental, are what Spinoza termed eternal, and they are as multitudinous as the stars in an expanded universe.¹⁶

The incidental movements of *tramjatra* are situational moments where an aesthetic encounter carries the complex and contradictory simultaneity of experiencing both converging and diverging forces.

> “His city is a collection of the routes he has travelled”. I had this phrase, amongst others, painted in English and Bengali translation behind the heads of passengers in a Kolkata tram installation in 1997. Eight years later my step from the Esplanade tram is met by the phrase keenly recited back to me by a young man. The moment jolts me in my tracks: my “city” is suddenly made plural, heterogenous, psycho-geographic. Tracing over a decade of *tramjatra* project activities, there are particular moments that stand out, like stars overhead providing co-ordinates through the night shaded with colonial legacies, stars glinting toward tracks ahead. Particular moments gather concentrated intensity and reveal a potential about which forces may pivot. Three of these moments fall into the aesthetic politics of reiterating the logic of tramways with a difference that provokes distraction; a jolt of the familiar made unfamiliar that could be called uncanny.

---


Melbourne artist Mark Misic made some extraordinary gestures during intensive project activities in 2001. In Kolkata Misic undertook an ephemeral visual drawing performance that he called *Diamond Cutters*, where he used bright-coloured local pigments hand-dusted into the shapes framed by tram tracks crossing over each other on the surface of Kolkata’s streets. The gesture echoed something of the local *alpana* practice, in the unlikely setting of high-volume street traffic, to celebrate an everyday way that this mode of transport patterns the city and the lives within it. With the travel of buses, trucks, taxis, cars and carts over the tracked ground, the pigment colours slowly became distributed beyond their *diamonds*. In Melbourne, Misic took portrait photographs of tram-drivers, the uncelebrated individuals (often new migrants) that keep the city moving, safely delivering us home. He transferred these portraits onto magnetic plastic sheets to distribute them onto the pavement-side metal poles that support the overhead wiring system of Melbourne’s tramways. Misic’s gestures become distributed and disappear amongst the multiple forces of the city, as do the efforts of tramways workers. Misic’s work offers a moment of wonder at the precious social structure and technological infrastructure of a system of transport that has the potential to move us beyond simply points in geography, but rather to move us with a multitude of affects.


---

17 *Alpana* is a form of ritual painting, usually undertaken by women, that temporarily decorates wall or floor surfaces of the home in patterns learnt from earlier generations.
When walking down the Swanston Street hill in central Melbourne of November 2001, one would encounter some of Melbourne’s familiar tramways infrastructure re-positioned in the urban landscape. Melbourne has its idiosyncratic bright-yellow safety barriers at centre-of-the-road tram-stops to protect embarking and disembarking passengers from passing motor traffic. These cast-concrete yellow objects have a form like a ship’s prow, but turned upside-down so as to serve as a tapered ramp facing the oncoming traffic. If a motor-vehicle drives into the upward tapering prow, the vehicle has its kinetic force redirected, riding upward until lifted and overturned onto its side or roof in order to protect the more vulnerable tram passengers waiting behind it. I seized upon the prow as leitmotif to physically and conceptually locate multiple tramjatra aesthetic actions into connection with one another around the central city. I negotiated temporary use of twelve of the large concrete safety barriers. In the darkness of night the hefty prows are craned into some less-than-usual civic locations to rest for 3 weeks: the steps of the Treasury Building where Victoria’s earlier gold-generated wealth accumulated; the pavement outside the State Library; the steps of St Pauls Cathedral opposite Flinders Street Train Station. Participating artists were invited to develop artwork in relation to a tram stop prow that had been recontextualised in the city. The recognisably unique artefact of the Melbourne tram-scape is momentarily brought back into an uncanny relationship with its context to give Melbournian’s self-recognition a shudder. Once distracted by the out-of-place familiar object, the passenger encounters the further aesthetic dimensions of different artists’ work situated by the prow-object, opening up potential moments of evocative travel, as if provoked momentarily into an ulta pulta (upside down) relation with the other urbanity of Kolkata.

double prow, Mick Douglas, + performance of twin trammies
As Debasish, Jayanta and I follow the tram tracks of the Maidan, we recall numerous tramjatra events played out at Esplanade tram terminus in central Kolkata. Most memorable is the occasion of our intervening to arrange the change of Calcutta’s Tramways Company (CTC) tram-conductors’ uniform for one day. Coinciding with the launch of the book “Tramjatra”, we worked with Kolkata NGO The Tomorrow Foundation to produce a batch of 300 shirts featuring a simplified image of a human lung on its chest: one lobe loosely mapping Kolkata’s tramway network and the other lobe mapping Melbourne’s tramway network. This performance intervention event, called shared lung, had us seek collaboration and approval at four levels, through unions, CTC management to the Minister for Transport. At each stage the approving individual official became incorporated into the gesture by being fitting with a shirt of their own. The Minister for Transport and the Chairman of the CTC were fitted with shared-lung shirts in a book launch ceremony on a pandal stage that the Minister ordered to be built at Esplanade terminus for the purpose. Reverent rituals of officialdom meet irreverent performance tactics of political aesthetics. When moving about the city that day one’s eyes catch on the bright white-lung on the sky-blue shirts worn by tram-conductors. Passengers curiously query and ponder the shift from the usual dusty-earth tones of uniform. Some conductors alter their breathing pattern with delighted jest.

shared lung, Kolkata, September 2005.

I recognise such uncanny moments according to an accumulated patterning of my arts practice that plays upon the dissonance of the familiar and unfamiliar. The more extraordinary moments are, for me, those that gathers together participants’ practices and the forces of the project and rearrange them in unexpected ways to produce something truly different with surprisingly new potential.
hybridising moments

Indian designer Jogi Panghaal, ticketed along with Suzie Attiwill as a critical passenger, would recall when a group of fifteen arts practitioners from Australia and India assembled in a circle on a north Kolkata guesthouse rooftop to first meet each other, for the tramjatra. Trepidation, curiosity and awkwardness are all present in the air. A video-camera is casually passed from person to person to record each others’ self-introductions. Both the turn to speak and the passed-on camera simultaneously arrives, by co-incidence, at Sarna Chitrakar, a patua (scroll painter) from the Midnipur district, a few hours west of Kolkata. The traditional practice of patuas is as mobile performing singers/storytellers/painters who sing narrative songs accompanying a painted scroll of imagery that is unfurled with the hands. Panghaal prompts Sarna to introduce herself through the medium of a patua’s work. With no scroll available at hand, she begins to sing a song that tells a story of the emergence of the patua chitrakar from the Santal indigenous community. Simultaneously throughout the five-minute song, Sarna points the recording video-camera from chest height in a slow pan across the faces of all those who gaze at her in this rooftop global circle of others, commencing and closing the pan with the camera’s capture of her own face, side on to the camera. This simple yet extraordinary gesture of the moment draws Sarna’s narrative song and narrative image-making practice into a new hybrid arrangement that employs the capture and replay capacity of sound and image in video. Whilst singing she uses the camera to “paint”, as it were, and unfurl attention toward the people drawn to her. The captured video image and sound becomes a trace of the performative event, not a representation of it.

There have been countless reminders made of the social status of the patuas being worlds below the other Indian nationals involved in the tramjatra project. Yet in walking MG Road with Sarna, the usual fixed distinctions seem to dissolve a little. Sarna’s improvised gesture in the moment throws forth her mode of practice, based on interlinking song and an unfurling image sequence, into a new transformative condition of potential. Rather than retreat to defensively affirm her traditional roots by taking an essentialised identity and place in tramjatra, she is utterly
present. Her action seizes contingent opportunity and pivots attention toward the moment of inter-dependant formation of subjectivities. Her performative gesture confidently inscribes renewed value to her patuanness in relation to all this present otherness. The moment re-ignites a passage from Homi K. Bhabha that bears tracing through again:

If the epistemological tends toward a “representation” of its referent, prior to performativity, the enunciative attempts repeatedly to “reinscribe” and relocate that claim to cultural and anthropological priority (High / Low; Ours / Theirs) in the act of revising and hybridising the settled, sententious hierarchies, the locale and locutions of the cultural. If the former is always locked into the hermeneutic circle, in the description of cultural elements as they tend towards a totality, the latter is a more dialogical process that attempts to track the processes of displacement and re-alignment already at work, constructing something different and hybrid from the encounter: a third space that does not simply revise or revert the dualities, but re-values the ideological bases of division and difference.\(^{18}\)

**Momentum**

**tracking momentum**

The elements are assembled: the tramways of the two cities; artists, activists and people concerned; the support of tramways operators, governments and their funding; a weave of historical narratives and accounts of experiences underneath us; the accumulation of thousands of face-to-face encounters marked by tickets; the attention of the Kolkatan and Melbournian media; and now our night walking and night talking along the tram-tracks of these cities. The journey gathers dynamic force.

The new work of concreting Kolkata’s tram tracks into the city is well-advanced as we walk Rash Behari Avenue. We see a few showcase trams recently fabricated by the government-run Calcutta Tramways Company’s local Nonapakur workshops. The last decade in Melbourne has seen new fleets of French and German-supplied tramcars and three different international private sector companies take on the role of operating the tramways system through competitive tender on the global market. I hear the new tender-winning Melbourne tramways operators in 2009 adopt the motto to “think like a passenger”.19 I feel like we are tracing over the printed three editions of a broadsheet paper published by tramjatra in Melbourne 2001, titled The Passenger, that was made by us as passengers and addressed to other passengers.

The commitment of political power to secure viable public transport for the future citizens of Kolkata and Melbourne continues to remain contentious. Curiously the newly laid tracks in Kolkata make no provision for clear points at which passengers may safely embark and disembark. “Thwarted in its effort to abolish trams in one fell swoop, the government has chosen the devious course of making them so hard to use that they will simply fade away”, proposes Chaudhuri.20 In Melbourne, re-modelling of road infrastructure includes efforts to increase tram prioritisation and reduce tram travel times. Those idiosyncratic yellow tram-stop prows are disappearing from the road as a new system of less frequent superstops are implemented with raised on-road passenger platforms at tram-floor height for ease of access, providing increased passenger ease and amenity. The on-street shelter and seating areas of the superstops are provided by public-private-partnerships between the State Government and multi-national advertising agencies to include seductively back-lit advertising space.21 Local cultural peculiarities dissolve with common displays of advertising brand imagery that can make global cities all start to look and feel the same. Meanwhile the communist-governed State of West Bengal continues its recalcitrant negotiation with the influence of capital. Street stalls will be serving tomorrow’s jhal moori

20 Chaudhuri, op cit. p. 35.
21 A global industry has spawned since the late 1990’s where advertising-revenue driven organisations provide high visibility city-street infrastructure at reduced expense to the city authorities in exchange for managing the revenue of the advertising space built-in to the infrastructure. Multi-national organizations JCDecaux and Adshel are the private partners in Melbourne’s tram “superstops”.

178 | PASSAGES — Tracing tramjatra: toward a participatory aesthetic politics
snacks in folded and glued sections of newspaper in which an uncredited Hindustan Times journalist writes:

The Calcutta tram needs as much modernisation as it needs to be romanticised. As tramjatra hints at, this is not a contradiction in terms. The trams in Calcutta lack what the trams in Melbourne have—functionality and the ability to be part of the modern. The trams in Melbourne seem to lack what the trams in Calcutta have: a fin-de-siecle quality that melds the machine with men.22

contra-momentum

In these tracks of tramjatra the reflective stick catches again on Sukanta Chaudhuri having spoken of Kolkata’s fabled intellectuals’ lack of engagement in civic issues (and tramjatra). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak tells it another way. In teasing apart the translations between English and Bengali through tramjatra, Spivak is both amused and dismayed at the “charmingly awkward” translations from English to Bengali, and has her hopes dashed in the Bengali to English translations: “I’m not asking for better translations [...] I’m asking for textual evidence of intellectual participation—maybe some “translations” going the other way?”23

A Western-biased internationalist global culture industry would present inter-cultural exchange through the arts as if it moved in pivot about an equidistant moment of power, as if made possible and presented from a neutral platform, as is too commonly still portrayed by an international museum and gallery system. Tracing this project of imagining Melbourne & Kolkata by tramways through the street reiterates the particularity of forces, desires and capital playing out differently in these contexts: the differing subjectivities acting on their own desires; the differing urbanities and civic cultures of Melbourne and Kolkata; the particular nationalisms acted out in Australia and India; and, on the one hand, the institutional aspirations and organisational interests for Melbourne to be located within the global network of capital, and on the other hand, the three-decade ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) in West Bengal resisting funding and dependency on foreign sources—such as approaches made to Kolkata’s tramways by Japanese and German interests.

Of course the legacies of colonialism carry momentum. My stick rides rough again through one of the last sections of Kolkata’s worn track that will soon be replaced and upgraded by local means. I pause, again, to consider, to imagine, to feel: going the other way?

Newly walking alongside on College Street is emerging scholar Sagar Dan. He has just delivered a conference presentation unravelling the involvement of *patua* Sarna Chitrakar in *tramjatra* in relation to global market forces and her ongoing formation of subjectivity. Earlier in the day I viewed Sarna’s one-by-three metre acrylic painting-on-canvas (no scroll and no song) titled “Bharatmata—Matribhoomi” (Mother India—Motherland) on display at the top end of town CIMA Gallery in its ReVIEW exhibition\(^{24}\), and heard rumour of a different work of hers being auctioned at Sotheby’s in New York—all news to Sagar. A scroll re-presented in the *tramjatra* book\(^{25}\) which Sagar analyses in his paper, portrays her humbling dismay at being unable to join the tramjatra in Melbourne of 2001 due to an “unexpected” child. Whilst Hindu mythology has been the most common content of patua practice in the last century, contemporary patua practice is that of a storytelling medium with no fixed story or song. With decreasing market demand for their performance of story-songs, patuas have increasingly taken commissions from NGO’s to convey stories on topics of women’s health, contraception, and rural issues. The participation of patuas in *tramjatra* extends this trajectory of new commissioning. Simultaneously Sarna and her generation of patuas encounter the pull of individualisation tugging them from their community context. Sarna and her song-writing brother have led the initiative of making *pats* (scrolls/songs) of new global stories as they encounter them. Prior to their *tramjatra* involvement was their first song scroll of this type, based upon the film *Titanic* and its story of love and the sinking ship, as told to them by a relative who had seen the film. Subsequently have come *pats* depicting the terrorism crisis of September 11 and the Gujarat earthquake. These new songs of significant global and national events are now openly shared by the patua community, joining their existing collective folklore of subject matter and know-how. No doubt this is both reflective of the increasingly global influences on their lives and their meeting an increasingly metropolitan and global market with viable product. The patuas are steadily picked up by a globalised appetite for regionally specific folk art to join the palette of art offerings on the

---

\(^{24}\) The image can be viewed at: [http://www.cimaartindia.com/NewCima/ReVIEW08/html/4957.html], 27 April 2009.  
international market. It is no surprise that the pats that attract strongest international interest are those that enact the strange contemporary moment of a once unlikely meeting between the local and the global: local rural artisan practice telling global crisis story of 9-11.

My new critical friend Sagar Dan, along with my old friend S.R. Rajen who has had a long relation with the patuas and worked with them throughout tramjatra, lament the loss of patua tradition to the global market. I share their concern. Yet I want to reiterate the resilient capacity of the patuas to navigate a path forward with integrity. I suggest to Sagar that if we construct his terms of the market, or high cult or mass cult, or “Mick representing high cult” as singular, then we deny the heterogeneity that is actually evidenced, and we deny the heterogeneity of actual paths of action available to us. I encourage us to find ways of criticality to work with the contradictions that co-exist in complex interweave. Sarna demonstrates some capacity to do this. I hope she is not alone. Sarna continues to find ways to navigate her path through patua tradition, increased international opportunities and global forces—including a project such as tramjatra—by returning to situate herself in the entanglement of her creative practice and her own formation of subjectivity. Sarna turns her direct experience and that of her kin, along with the mediated information and culture she encounters of the world, into the material for her patua practice. She is able to work tactically, to make do, to work with surprise and to produce surprise.

It’s a delight to explore complexity and contradiction walking alongside Sagar. When he manages to enter my contact details into his mobile-phone that is showing “memory-full”, I can’t resist jesting to his cheeky smiling face: “so you just erased one of your local contacts in order to remember someone from the global market like me?”

**tracing momentum**

With the prospect of dawn soon arriving we are poised at a juncture. Writer Soumitra Das, a residing local owl of North Calcutta, is teasing tales of buildings, families, traders and tram-travellers as his stick leads us through the realms he inhabits of the street. For Soumitra, “tramjatra creates a space—albeit mental—where two apparently disparate cultures can emote”.26 Jayanta Basu is describing that he feels like an activist doing this: doing what he is thinking and thinking what he is doing. I raise again that our method belongs to the realm of habitus as a practice. According to Australian cultural studies writer Stephen Muecke:

---

following is “tracking up”, hunting, discovering a singularity. In the Aboriginal science of tracking, following someone’s footsteps means to “know” them. To walk exactly in their footsteps means that there is an imitation—not a reproduction—of the whole movement of their bodies.27

The practice of following a force or dynamic momentum disrupts the convenient distinctions between subject and object, mind and body. Personal sensibilities are attenuated, given resonance and significance through seamlessly incorporating the negotiated modulations en track. By following the tramways of Melbourne and Kolkata we come to know their operative logic of movement: a form of experiencing, learning and knowing through miming rather than representing. Suzie Attiwill28 puts forward a familiar line from Gilles Deleuze: “[…] art is never an end in itself […] It is only an instrument for tracing lines of life […] What it lays out are paths—it is itself a voyage”.29

Mahadeb and I walk Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road side-by-side with sticks in hand surrendering to the groove of Kolkata’s tracks. In response to Mahadeb’s expression of the twin concerns of tramjatra I propose that this relation between the aesthetic concerns of art and the political concerns of activism has indeed been the primary dialogical tension embedded in the project. There have been occasions when it has seemed impossible for two people to meet the challenge of experiencing adequate openness in themselves for their encounter to register a difference to their own preoccupations, let alone two regimes of culture, organisation, disciplinary orientation, political economy or urban condition. My feet have been pacing this question of how the tensions of difference may be lived out for their potentially transformative power. Again and again I return to a creative method of mobility seeking to practice a criticality without distinction between art and activism or between the traveller and the journey, and so to side-step the distinction of distance between human subject and investigated object. Maintaining the frisson of difference whilst building commonality to communicate is an art, one that engages in the agonistics of dialogue by maintaining movement between entities, prescribed objects and identities to create what Homi Bhabha inscribed for us earlier: something different and hybrid from the encounter: a third space that does not simply revise or revert the dualities, but re-values the ideological bases of division and difference. This is the heterogenous aesthetic politics we might move toward.

One moment Melbourne’s bright yellow concrete tram-stops have lost their weight and are drifting through consciousness, effortlessly lifted by crane into unlikely locations. Kolkatan mosquitos dive into Melbournian’s new blood. Two cities of the former empire—one ranked amongst the most vulnerable in the world to climate change, the other having been badged in the 1990s as the world’s most livable city—are reconnected by the datum lines of tram track. A Kolkatan questioned by immigration officials upon arrival at Melbourne airport announces that “fourteen million people wouldn’t be able to hold me back from my city”.30

It is like a dream, casually remarks Kolkatan writer Nabaneeta Dev Sen of the book tramjatra at the book’s Calcutta Club launch. People, things, feelings, knowledge and cultures transported and in transformation. The first tram of the morning sneaks up around the corner. We decide to make a run for it. In Melbourne the electric-motor controlled doors open when the vehicle is stationary and we take our turn to step

into the air-conditioned cabin. In Kolkata we run faster and faster till boldly reaching out to the handrail of the moving vehicle to take a leap onto the door-less running-board. The passenger loaded up with bags of vegetables laconically asks “where do you go from here?” Our bones chatter with the reverberations on steel tracks travelling through our legs. Tramjatra is an ongoing process of making passage.
Uncertain occupations: cultural transports and transformations at play

Khush amadeed. Welcome on the W-gerah. You’ve stepped aboard the W-11 Tram exploring an art of journeys. Gathered aboard are the heterogeneous voices of a changing assemblage of people, and many live forms of action. There is a dynamic sense of motion and emotion at play. This tram is actually travelling repeated circles of inner city Melbourne Australia, yet you discover this strange mobile environment has every surface re-constructed and overwhelmingly embellished by W-11 mini-bus decorators of Karachi Pakistan—chamak patti wallahs Iqbal, Nadeem, Safdar and Arshad. Hosts of both cities welcome you aboard, whilst the conjunction of simultaneously travelling Melbourne tram and Karachi decorated mini-bus induces uncertainty as to what is going on here—or there—to where are you travelling and with whom?

In my almost-convincing official Tramtactic host uniform I am assuming an artist’s self-created occupation. I might tell your friend that I undertake a practice of making kinds of carriage. But to you I'll confess that such a practice cannot speak with one totalising voice. I take the role of affording carriage to multiple voices. I'll accompany you on a path that criss-crosses through two projects of this practice exploring the dynamics of uncertainty. These temporary public art projects engage with the movement inducing potential that uncertainty brings to modes of urban occupation. It is a practice in which I, the practitioner, am occupied by uncertainty and create an uncertain occupation for myself. My work induces an uncertainty in occupying place, position and practice. Fostering uncertainty disrupts orthodox forms of organisation that seek to distinguish and clearly separate artists and non-artists, artwork and art audience, disciplined knowledge and uncertain knowing, permanent possession and appropriated occupation. The projects mobilise the power of social agency away from a commonly perceived binary condition of, on the one hand, being conglomerated in the State institution or increasingly the corporation, and on the other hand, being a sociality fragmented amongst individuals as floating consumers of the free-market system. The practices explored here work towards processes that differently modulate the dynamic re-distribution of power. With tramways and pedal-powered modes of transport as its mediums, these projects provoke contingent assemblages of participants to engage with their own capacity to effect change and to engage in living with the multiplicity of social agency and the non-human forces of contemporary life in the world.
W-11 Tram passengers encounter performing hosts and each other during the Tram Otherwise laps of the city during the Melbourne summer 2006-2007 season, photo Karen Trist.
Indeed you may not be travelling by tram today, but rather, have come by bike. I meet you at the door: *Greetings! Fantastic you could come for dinner*. You arrive on your bicycle at a domestic residence expecting some kind of an event as part of the tongue-in-cheek titled West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial. I offer you a red cloth napkin and loosely fit it around your neck as we excitedly chatter. I fit the person next to you with a red cloth apron. You lead your bikes through the house, tasting a tomatoe *sugo* from the stove-top on the way through the kitchen and spill out to the rear yard. A hundred others are gathered, bikes are propped all over the place, a couple of pans on gas burners are being worked atop little kitchens integrated into two strange pedal vehicles. The scene is spiced with the colour red: all who have gathered wearing either red napkin or apron. There is no flamboyantly expressed menu and no itinerary known. It is the sense of expectation that is savoured, along with backyard fresh appetisers. Bicycle-produced sounds build as everyone returns to their trusty set of wheels until the metallic ensemble reaches crescendo and the kitchen-vehicles lead off down the drive-way and onto the inner-city street commencing the so-called “ride-on-dinner”.

Cyclists assemble in a domestic rear yard during *ride-on-dinner #5*, part of West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial, Melbourne 2009, photo Karen Trist.
People follow food. The *ride-on-dinner* is a participatory arts performance event that follows relations between food, transportation and cultural change through collective action. The open invitation reads:

*Join a swarm of cyclists on a gentle rolling urban meal adventure. A slow meal journey takes a unique route through urban environments for each different ride-on-dinner event, served from pedal-powered vehicles over the duration of an easy early-evening cycle. This mobile event demonstrates simple pleasures in hospitality and local knowledge whilst feeling the way for more sustainable food and transport systems. Diners become co-creators riding relationships between individual human body, the temporarily collected social body and the body of the urban fabric. It is an event pedalled by anyone who wants to along with the Cultural Transports Collective, including artists, chefs, transport industry workers, performers, children, academics, good-for-nothings and you. The food is vegetarian made from local produce and offered on a donate-as-you-feel basis. First to roll up, first for dinner.¹*

As the swarm of riders pedal through the central city I hear one of my apron-wearing accomplices yarning about her delight with quality food, our network of local organic growers, and how far you could ride having eaten a banana—but pity that your banana had to travel from 2,000 kilometres north of here by truck! The colour red that visibly marks and links all participants in the swarm is evident to the street-side on-lookers thinking: *who are they and what are they doing whilst they look like they’re having such fun?* Participants become self-aware of the agency they bring to the event in their ambivalent occupation of a “performer” role. The swarm occupies two lanes of the road next to the tram stop as we wait for a change in the traffic lights. Private cars with deep-throat exhausts rumble; upbeat pedestrians of all colours and shapes pace the pavement; and…an outlandishly dressed tram pulls up exuding the confident enthusiasm of a peacock. All eyes are on the tram and the excited changing of its passengers.

¹ See: <www.ride-on-dinner.net>
In a climate of rising social fear and misunderstanding of Muslim cultures after the crisis of September 11, I had collaborated with the Pakistani vehicle decorators to transform a Melbourne tram, its sides bearing a phrase taken from the side of a Karachi mini-bus, in Urdu and English: “piyar zindagi hai / love is life”. My premise was to simply transpose a typical Karachi experience of travel by decorated mini-bus in an Islamic society, onto a typical Melbourne experience of travel by tram in an increasingly cosmopolitan society. Through this transposition I sought to explore the hybridised space of hospitality that might be produced. During the project’s second season of twenty Friday evenings over 2006-2007 summer, the W-11 Tram undertook six 50-minute laps of the Melbourne City Circle route, starting and finishing at the city’s Federation Square, creating a dynamic, free-to-enter and mobile public space with a disarming atmosphere.
Three different types of artful journeys took place to explore dialogue, improvisation and hospitality, with each journey comprising a lap of the city. “Tram Overheard” had me invite two strangers to undertake a conversational journey of dialogue—discussing issues of mobility and migration, transportation and cultural change, hospitality and the public realm—whilst amplified throughout the tram interior. Conversationalists included writers, academics, performers and activists, with each dialogue tracing a line of dialogical thought around civic Melbourne. “Tram Overboard”\(^2\) had me invite guest artists to lead an improvised performance journey for a lap of the city. This involved a diverse array of musicians, dancers, performers and live artists leading unique shared experiences in negotiation with the conditions aboard the tram in the city at its given moment. “Tram Otherwise” had onboard hosts in Tramtactic uniform leading a journey of cultural collisions between Melbourne and Karachi, interacting with passengers, utilising free artwork tickets, playing music that transports (recordings of Pakistani folk music that is commonly blasted from the W-11 mini-buses) and initiating dancing with and between a very diverse range of passengers.

The Tram Overheard conversations still resonate with me. In the last Friday of the season I doubled my role from host to also be “stranger”, encountering postcolonial scholar Leela Gandhi. We were discussing hospitality and the politics of friendship. I had especially grown a moustache of dubious subcontinental style for the project’s summer season. For this last night of the season I had shaved it off and replaced it with a professionally made replica, made from other people’s hair, glued above my lips. With a sense of childish curiosity I wanted to experience ripping the moustache surprisingly from my face on the last of last laps as a gesture of ambivalent identity at play. For now the damn thing is holding my upper lip semi-rigid. Feels like my face will crack and the hairy thing fall off if I smile. It’s tough controlling my urges to laugh. She’s looking at it! Leela must be thinking there is something creepy about me! “Come back to the conversation” I tell myself as Leela elaborates:

---

\(^2\) The title “tram overboard” is a wink to the Australian political controversy known as Children Overboard involving “public allegations by Howard government ministers in October 2001, in the lead-up to a federal election, that sea-faring asylum seekers had thrown children overboard in a presumed ploy to secure rescue and passage to Australia.” An enquiry “later found that no children had been thrown overboard, and that the government knew this prior to the election. The government was criticised for misleading the public and cynically “(exploiting) voters’ fears of a wave of illegal immigrants by demonising asylum-seekers”.” Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children_overboard_affair>, accessed 29 May 2009.
...for this conversation the idea of strangeness becomes very important, and we want to maintain the strangeness between us but what we’re really trying to do is find common ground, and as we talk I’m recognizing you as someone I can talk to. So, to what extent is foreignness or strangeness or the retention of those things useful for a civic or communitarian ethics?³

Relief as my attention shifts away from my fake moe. I tell of how not finding the familiar can be a way of liberating oneself from static essentialist conditions of place, identity or affiliation. One can be mobilised by slipping outside one’s most immediate recognition, by finding ways to be present in a situation for what that moment is offering up in all its unfamiliarity. So how is it, I ask Leela, that you find friendship a useful tool for thinking and living?

*I think the concept of friendship that became very interesting to me was not friendship with those who are like you, but what I like to think of as xenophilia, of friendship towards foreigners, as a kind of politics. And often it’s a kind of politics that makes you go to cleave apart from where you come from, to be unfaithful to where you are, and unfaithful to those who are like you, in order to keep your faith with those who are unlike you.*⁴

“W-gerah! W-gerah! W-gerah!” my fellow hosts chant out the doors and windows as we pause at tram stops. “Allah Walli!” of Karachi is chanted alongside “Docklands!” of Melbourne. I was beginning to recall a line of thought I’d traveled before, about disrupting orthodox forms of organisation by working aesthetically and tactically with contingency to open up creative opportunities of relationship between artists and non-artists, participants and audiences, and amongst the various stake-holding actors in social networks. An inclusive assemblage of people are present here in an actively co-creating and co-constituting role with the “artwork” in the public realm. This is a shift that induces a movement of tension in relation to the prevalent Western aesthetics notion that is affirmed by the autonomy of object-based art and theatre-framed performance. Call it an exploration of participatory inter-active *response-ability* if you will, where projects have an inter– and trans-artform basis, an inter-dependent

³ unpublished transcripts from the event documented at <www.tramtactic.net/W-11/2007/05/ departure_20_leela_gandhi_mick.html>

⁴ ibid.
constitution of elements, involve inter– and trans–disciplinary activity and often inter– and cross–cultural relations. These qualities point to a shift in our perception and understanding of mobile art forces and artistic relations, produced live, to be experienced live as a perpetual process of producing new subjects and forms of aesthetic experience.


Leela’s thoughts turn. “We’re so preoccupied with this idea of difference, I’m just starting to wonder if the idea of familiarity or likeness is probably not as important”. Social science academics Vin D’Cruz and Michele Grossman encountered each other in dialogue aboard the tram a week earlier. They explored how Australian society was experienced as being more open for new migrants like Vin to occupy it in the 1950’s compared to the current social conditions motivated by fear. Michelle proposes it also has to do with globalization.

So much more now is coming to people, where they are. They’re not having to exert themselves particularly, or having to think very hard. The commodification of difference: it’s like going shopping or ordering it off a menu in a restaurant. They’re no longer having to engage with difference in a way that means they are taking particular risks, and there is a sense of complacency then, about the rest of the world that has grown accordingly. The complacency that is set in now is the sense that you don’t have to go to the world, why? Because the world comes to you.6

Yet Vin wants to focus on how much is now happening by people filled with both hope and despair working with refugees and indigenous Australia. He wants us to “seek out these points of positive movements of the heart.”7

Do socially-engaged public art practices affect social and cultural movement, or movements of the heart? It’s now easy to make an artistic shift by “contaminating this with that” to produce a hybrid commodity product because it sells, writer Sudesh Mitra tells philosopher and dance writer Phillipa Rothfield during another Tram Overheard conversation:

Every form we have to begin with is already hybrid in some way at some point, and it’s just that we forget that it is so. The sense of hybridity that we would want is an expert knowledge of two or three system or forms before one comes with something else.8

5 ibid.
6 unpublished transcripts from the event documented at <www.tramtactic.net/W-11/2007/03/departure_19_vin_dcrucz_michele_1.html>
7 ibid.
8 unpublished transcripts from the event documented at <www.tramtactic.net/W-11/2007/03/departure_17_sudesh_mishra_phi_1.html>
In looking out the tram window I also see its surface of multiple layering reflections and recognise anew in this moment the power of collage. Mitra’s *hybridity* has me recall philosopher Jacques Ranciere on the aesthetic politics of *collage*. For Ranciere:

> it’s this negotiation between forms of art and those of non-art that permits the formation of combinations of elements capable of speaking twice: from their readability and from their unreadability,

leveraging that he calls:

> a play on the line of indiscernability between the force of readability of sense and the force of strangeness of non-sense.\(^9\)

There is a sticker going around on bicycles since the invasion of Iraq that says “burn fat not oil”. If you’ve been cycling you’ll be getting hungry. Having been led by pedal-powered kitchen vehicles through a less than usual sequence of spatial passages of the city, the swarm of cyclists pull over to gather in an outdoor public space, perhaps in a dead-end laneway, beneath a road flyover, in a public park or on a pedestrian bridge high above an eight lane tollway. Your curiosity is pricked when you see another rider having removed their helmet—as road laws in Australia require all cyclists to wear a helmet—and walk toward the pedalled kitchen vehicles. I fold a lining of doubled paper in an origami-like manner, and by placing it inside the upturned helmet, transform the helmet to a bowl to be presented to the communal pot for a feed.

This key gesture of each rider eating out of their own upturned helmet seeded a direction and tenor for the operations of a project. It is a gesture that anticipated an ethos around which people may assemble alongside one another: pursuing simple aesthetic clarity embedded in acts of gifting and receiving; by practicing with an economy yet with pleasure in matters of material usage; by directly engaging with concepts of embodied energy born out of a sensory pleasure with human powered and scaled systems; and most importantly, through exploring the pleasure of surprise in making use of—and occupying—given conditions in unpremeditated ways. This gesture, that I’ve subsequently called “eating your head”, explores the simple infectiousness of demonstrating a way of playing between believability and unbelievability—the readability of sense and the strangeness of non-sense—to enliven experience of aesthetic engagement with contemporary challenges.

There is nothing like a surprisingly good feed to lift the spirits and prompt a creative and hopeful desire amongst those gathered. It is true that this event takes place by occupying people and environment without food-handling certification by authorities, without permits for use of public space, without street closures or police escorts, and without pre-arrangement between core hosts and participants. The event occupies the fragile conditions that enable collectivity to emerge, to swarm, to form patterns and to dissipate. I sense the digestive system is doing its work. Restful conversation abounds; time to move on.

“Whoever does not get moving learns nothing. Yes, depart, divide yourself into parts” says philosopher Michel Serres. There are many forces of contemporary cultures that might seem to want to hold us and have us align to a prescribed line of practice, whether that be acting as consumer of given production; as disciple of disciplinariness; as knower possessing objects of certain knowledge; as spectator of spectacle; as occupant of an occupancy now vacant. Yet we can’t underestimate the co-optive power and transformative appropriations that passengers and guests bring to that which carries us on a trajectory of passage or that which locates us in a social relation, just as we so-called consumers assert tactical agency in relation to that which arrives at us pre-produced. There is an increased mobility and ambiguity in cultural circulations that

---


make the experience of actual lived occupancy, use and practice more complex and intriguing than maintaining separate domains of production and consumption would have us believe.

The everyday kinesthetic experience of moving about in our lives in the public domain remains a mode of experience where engagement with forces beyond our own productive and consumptive agency can be readily felt. The motions of kinesthetic transport entwines in strange relations with the emotions of felt, remembered and imagined carriage. We move, and are moved, in an enfolding of motion and emotion, effects and affects. Modes of transport offer sites and situations of public encounter where occupancy is called into question and dynamic forces of relation are brought into play. When aboard a tram I am aware of the ever-changing assemblage of a community temporarily brought together, moving together despite differences, then dissolving. Ah, but how riding my bicycle can deliver an incomparable sense of my individual agency amongst the complex urban social fabric!

Each *ride-on-dinner* project is initiated in relationship to a partnering group, organisation or event that has its own momentum, to which the dinner project rides alongside and offers its own act of hospitality. The host-guest relationship typically structuring social situations of hospitality is shifted by the experimental gestures of the *ride-on-dinners* in an attempt to have all individuals engage with how their own agency affects collectivity. Upon first encounter at a ride, the core Cultural Transports Collective hosts fit either cloth napkin or apron to arriving participants. Those who receive an apron are marked in the same way as the core hosts, signalling an authorisation of participants to slide back and forth between roles of guest and host. As the marking of participants as either guest (napkin) or host (apron) is arbitrary, the distinction between the two social positions and their conventions are called into question and given the potential of play.

\[12\] By working in specific relation to each group, working with that group’s purpose for gathering and their immediate environment, the project brings a heightening resonance in relation to the social, circumstantial and environmental contexts through which it occurs. The project first emerged as part of a community-based Pedal Powered Vehicles Workshop that I hosted at RMIT University, from which the first kitchen vehicle infrastructure was developed. Subsequent dinners have taken place as part of a forum on sustainable transport, a gallery exhibition event with research group Urban Interior who undertook an “Occupation” of Craft Victoria gallery in Melbourne, and more recently as part of a Sculpture Triennial.
Cyclists commence *ride-on-dinner #4* by moving through the Craft Victoria central city gallery space, meeting a host and proceeding down a lift to a rear laneway. Part of Urban Interior Occupation, Melbourne 2008, photo Jacob Walker.

At one *ride-on-dinner* it was a delight to experience almost a hundred cyclists in the happenstance repetition of riding in circular motion on the Yarra river’s gravel edge, echoing the diameter of a Ferris wheel turning in the night sky above us, until after a few minutes that seemed an eternity, the swarm spun outward to cohere into a new direction of motion. With my stomach satisfied by local organic food cooked up on pedalled vehicles I feel all the more connected with my body, this temporarily collected social body and the body of the city. I’m kinaesthetically enamoured in such a fleeting moment determined by none of us, yet produced by all of us in an unspoken moment of creative collaboration.
Are we looking to be gathered together by big narrative ideas of creative arts movement and social movement that have a sense of certainty, stated value or intended outcome? The projects of my practice privilege occupying processes of cultural transformation above prescribed ends and goals for transformation. They are oriented toward enabling direct aesthetic encounters between people, rather than between people and representations, grounded in the ordinary and everyday, yet triggering engagement with the extraordinary contingency of life. Forces are multitudinous aboard the *W-11 Tram* or amongst a swarm of *ride-on-dinner* cyclists. With uncertainty comes the dynamisms of tension, opportunity and most importantly the potential for transportative movement and transformational change. Making conditions for forces to remain at play fosters the possibility for the desire for *living* change to rise above desires to possess something as a sign of change. This experience is of desire as a freedom acknowledged, pursued, played with and lived with; not that of a freedom simply to be attained. It’s these moments of live contingent occurrence that challenge and extend our modes of assimilation and have us participate in a re-distribution of the multiple regimes of direction, organisation and structure in our lives.

The open-ended form of a journey affords an experiential logic that links the extra-ordinary with the ordinary, art with life, the aesthetic with the social into embodied modes of living with contemporary conditions. The work of a ride-on-dinner or W-11 Tram project seeks to create provisional structures of social relations, trust, and allied forces that enable the potential of transporting moments to occur, accumulate and give rise to a potential groundswell of movement and transformational change. This is the multi-layered task of net-work, of weaving net-like conditions that bring art-to-life and life-to-art in ways that activate movement in the relation between entities. It is the unveiling of potentiality embedded in reality, the way that people create what anthropologist Ghassan Hage calls “utopic moments” in everyday life to help themselves live on. Not the grand idea of all-encompassing Utopia, but rather a minor “utopia”, says Hage “is the moment that tries to play the game of shifting what ought and might be into the dimension of what is, moving it along the way”.\(^\text{13}\) Conservative forces may wish to proclaim, protect and occupy what “reality” is, whilst a hopeful politics seeks to engage fluid potentiality to elicit moments of inhabiting what might be, or ought to be, a dynamics of irresolvable openness.

My practice of cultural transports and transformations works to trace lines of aesthetic politics where uncertainty resides in a perpetual condition of negotiating motion, emotion and play, and so enabling experience of ephemeral moments that reveal the potentiality of social relations bonded by the reciprocity of care, generosity and hope. Participants encounter each other situated together with the provisional links enabled by the infrastructure and social structure of the project, each participant potentially aware of their agency that assembles and dissembles themselves as individual contributors to an ephemeral collective. Perhaps the utopic moments of greatest potential are simply those where the very afforded potentiality of movement is embodied in its becoming, as the unpremeditated tracing of an improvisational path greeting the unknown in all its irrepressible surprise; that is, in the ongoing formation of subjectivity.

\(^\text{13}\) Ghassan Hage “The real, the potential and the political”, in Tsoutsas, Nicholas (ed) Knowledge+Dialogue+Exchange: remapping cultural globalisms from the south, Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney 2005; p. 69.
With my tongue in my cheek I introduce myself as a carriage artist: transforming modes of transport into mediums of art experience; enabling new kinds of mobility of individual and collective human agency; making conditions to inhabit and experience the interconnections of too often abstracted social qualities. Two hours later on that last W-11 Tram journey and the High God People, a group of Melbourne visual and sound artists, join a singer of Sufi songs and a tabla player to fill the tram with rich sounds and gestures for the very last Tram Overboard lap of the city. Rain has suddenly dumped down on the hot and muggy Melbourne evening. Soaked passengers join those already aboard and heavily perspiring to make the visceral qualities of our bodies more intensely felt. There is no grand single spectacle when riding this W-11 Tram or pedalling the ride-on-dinner: there are multiple partial glimpses and many particular experiences unique to every encounter. I grab the hairy animal moustache-thing above my lips and tease it from my skin, place it in a small zip-lock plastic bag and pin it to the breast of my uniform. “W-gerah! W-gerah!” A few moments later I’m asked “didn’t you have a moustache?” As my finger points to that thing on my shirt-breast I get a look of confusion, then shrieks of surprise: equally horrified and delighted. I am, after all, interested in practicing a dynamic engagement with the ongoing formation of subjectivities. Time to move on. Ah, you’ve missed your stop you say? Not to worry, we’re moving through circles.

14 This event is documented at <www.tramtactic.net/W-11/2007/05/departure_20_shoaib_safi_hi_go.html>
Situation social contingency and the urban interior

Half a dozen tenant hosts and I stand in front of a locked-up metal shipping container in the warm evening air of an inner city Melbourne public housing estate. We’ve packed-up the LiveHouse public art project for the night. Now we pause under the full moon that illuminates the three housing towers and talk our way through the events of the day, opening them up again. For a moment our motley grouping of people, who’ve come from different parts of the globe, wonder at having gathered not just ourselves, but also having been gathered amongst the many others that were with us earlier in the evening. Under moonlight, being with people in this urban condition seems to resonate with the tension between the isolating boundaries of those self-contained living-units stacked one upon another, and the potential of other forms of relatedness. We are acting-out the prevailing forces of the day: increasing urbanisation; rising mobility of populations, goods, information and capital; and the unsettling challenges to traditional sociality that might normatively gather us around identity-based categories of belonging, such as being of a nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, class, gendered role and so on. Our lingering conversation has us drift from the moorings of these bounded places, identities and living units. We seem to be simultaneously experiencing both a sense of displacement from somewhere and sometime, whilst also contingently participating in our gathering taking place here and now.

Whilst present with my new friends, I am mindful of the shift in much international contemporary art, of the last decade or so, toward social and contextual modes of engagement.1 I’m curious about how socially-engaged public art practice can remain open to contingent events that might otherwise fall outside the preconceived frame of interests. Studio-based arts practice has a history of engaging chance within its frame, whilst much public art has sought to minimise the role that the potentially abundant contingencies at play in the public domain may have upon the work. Practicing public art with attentiveness to contingency would challenge the assumed sovereignty of ideas and operations. It would ask that the accidental and risky not be removed. Perhaps by animating the contradiction inherent in attempting to situate social contingency, public art practice might pursue a performative social aesthetics. This might be where the agonistics of a cosmopolitan Australian urban interior takes place, giving rise to new forms of expressive democracy.

LiveHouse summer 2009-2010 at Carlton Housing Estate, photo Rob Blackburn.

LiveHouse summer 2009-2010 at Carlton Housing Estate, photo tenant host.
event 1

Unhinged, the timber-framed glass front door of the house is awkward in my arms. I am attempting to lay it on its long-sided-edge, onto the paved rear courtyard of this domestic residence in inner-city Melbourne. It’s a 1950s built house, once the home of southern European migrants, now a group-shared house rented by youthful artists of mixed cultural background. Once a month the artists invite other artists to stage an exhibition, usually contained to one of the house’s bedrooms off a central passage, as part of a project they call DudeSpace.²

I’ve unhinged all the doors of the central passage. First, the front entrance—two layers of glass door, and steel-mesh security door, that make the threshold between private and public domains. Then an internal hallway door, followed by another two layers of rear doors—that provide exit to a paved and fruit-tree filled rear yard. Five doors removed in total, creating uninhibited passage from the public street front, into the house, and through to its fenced rear yard.

I am reassembling the doors by their hinges to make two “A” shaped trestle legs, onto which to place the fifth door as a bench-top surface. The makeshift bench made-of-doors will provide a location for a participatory bread-making activity in the yard during the day. With the house to myself, I negotiate the weight of this door in my attempt to attach it by its hinges, always pivoting, to the hinges of another door. This new arrangement of pivots has the redistribution of weight and force behaving in ways unfamiliar to me. In a split second I recognise my best option is to let go.

A shattering chorus erupts as a thousand glass fragments separate from the door-frame and each other. Everything that seemed momentarily in pattern now reveals an unexpected new arrangement of simultaneous compression and explosion; containment and release. Aesthetic conventions are there laid before me: the frame that marks the relation of text and context, form to field, work to world. The plane of experience is fragmented into a thousand prisms through which to refract the relations of a greater world, and a creative practice, no longer quite so simply in our hands.

² Such a project is one of many instances of artist-run ventures exploring alternative modalities for the production and reception of art practices. DudeSpace was led by artist Geoff Newton and run 2004-2005 in a Brunswick house. He subsequently co-founded the Melbourne commercial gallery Neon Park.
If you watch the short promotional film “The City Speaks”\(^3\) that the Housing Commission of Victoria made about the 1950s and 60s conversion of “slums” to Melbourne’s walk-up and high-rise flats, you might notice the dramatic contrast between the depicted Anglo-Celtic tenants of housing back then, and the cosmopolitan mix of tenants of the Carlton Housing Estate now. It is a stark reminder to me of the “White Australia” immigration policy operating then, and the global mobility and amplified forces of migration we live with now. The Estate currently houses a high proportion of established and newly-arrived migrants, with half the residents having been born overseas. Almost half the households are a lone person; almost half of all families are one-parent families; and nearly one third are migrants from the Horn of Africa.\(^4\) Housing in Carlton is again undergoing another wave of significant change. In 2007, I was invited by the local government to develop an arts project to coincide with the estate undergoing redevelopment in a public-private partnership.\(^5\)

\(^3\) *The City Speaks*, short promotional film by the Housing Commission of Victoria, produced by Crawford Productions, Melbourne, 1965.

\(^4\) *Opportunities for Carlton: Statistics and Demographic Data—Carlton public housing estate sites*, City of Melbourne document, from source ABS Census 2006.

\(^5\) The LiveHouse project was commissioned as part of the Carlton Flats Arts Project produced by the City of Melbourne Community Cultural Development Program and developed by artist Mick Douglas of RMIT University School of Architecture & Design with residents of the Carlton Housing Estate, supported by the Office of Housing. See <www.livehouse.net.au>
I have ridden a bicycle through the Estate for fifteen years, travelling between the central city and my middle-class inner-city family house. It is my preferred route on hot summer nights, when one can encounter tenants of all ages, often of African descent, gathering without goals or purposes in the calm and distinctly non-commercial occupation of the central outdoor public space till late hours. It's a practice that has seemed uncommon in this city: one that I only later learnt was relative to how suffocatingly hot the flats remain after summer days. The co-incidence of my movement and that of tenants in the Estate’s public space is part of the overlaying interaction of rhythms that Henry Lefebvre reminds us composes the dynamism of cities. The housing re-development process presents a cyclical change of longer duration. The shift to private enterprise being involved in formerly state-provided services, along with artists gaining commissioned involvement with processes of urban redevelopment, are part of a prevailing pattern of economic market-driven urban development. I’m curious about how global and local forces converge in this setting. At face value, it’s a setting of housing accommodation. Yet it might also be a site of conjunction and disjunction: where some of the most salient contemporary social issues of migration, mobility and cosmopolitan civic culture encounter the

problematics of sovereignty and hospitality. With an interest in questioning how I may practice in social and cultural processes, I wonder how a public art practice might animate, amplify and perhaps provoke a reflective awareness of the role of the arts in the rhythms of uneven urban development? Could a practice do so without becoming subsumed in the existing power arrangements driving the change: by resisting being a mere social bridge-building exercise that paves the way for market interests irrespective of broader interests?

After 18 months of working with tenants, local agencies and university design students, we have custom-modified a shipping container, and temporarily landed it for the summer months in the central corridor public space of the housing estate. Under the title LiveHouse, the project has evolved as an attempt to mobilise carriage for creative social inter-action that might bring to life the tensions, contradictions and differences in this urban context. I’m hoping it may provoke enlivened social engagement, new creative possibilities and the potential for self-transformation for participants.

event 2

“Pakistani police say at least 62 bodies have been found inside a sealed shipping container parked near a town close to the country’s border with Afghanistan. The Afghan victims were being smuggled through Pakistan for a better life abroad” reports the middle-eastern media group Al Jazeera.7 Concurrent to this disastrous event, shipping containers gain cache as raw aesthetic architectural elements for designer-modified environments.8 The standard unit container of international shipping is indeed a potent thing in our present times, evoking the harshest extremities of material reality. There may be exciting possibilities presented by these metal boxes full of goods moving about the earth, fuelling consumer desires and economic activities. There may also be a deathly coldness to the excesses of all this materialist mobility, the excessive associated carbon footprint, the airlessness of manic consumerism, and the tragic dark side of human movement seeking better life.

7 Report on April 4th 2009, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g51_idubrx0>. Later reports modify the number to 46, such as on wikinews at <http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/46_illegal_Afghan_immigrants_suffocate_in_truck_in_Pakistan>, accessed 20 May 2010.
8 See <http://home.comcast.net/~plutarch/> for examples of containers used as architectural elements, which LiveHouse has now joined. Accessed 20 July 2010.
Earlier in the afternoon the Estate tenant hosts of LiveHouse unlocked the container, extended its full-side-opening doors outward and unfurled its canopy to establish an openly hospitable, obligation-free outdoor social setting. Trolleys of modest equipment roll out to offer African coffee and mint tea. Tables are set up for a micro-market that is run by women bantering in Turkish, Iranian, Somali and English. Rugs and stools are cast about the place. Resident musicians and neighbours explore an overlay of Latin percussion onto Middle-Eastern melodies. The screen along one side of the container is set up in readiness for a spontaneous shadow-play performance. This opening-up on Friday evenings has emerged as a regular summer pattern. Over the last six Fridays it has included an open improvised performance process. Weekly iterations have developed into a set of participatory performance gestures involving tenants of the estate, neighbours and whoever happens to pass through and join in at the time. Tonight is the last Friday of the summer and the last of these performance nights. “Join LiveHouse tenant hosts and Estate residents for LiveHouse Lights-Out”, says the invitation card distributed around the neighbourhood.9

**event 3**

A swarm of almost a hundred cyclists slowly enter the central corridor public space of the Estate that provides a north-south through-passage for pedestrians and cyclists. Flashes of red-coloured cloth appear on each rider who, it appears, wears either an apron, or a napkin from the neck. A cyclist tells a tenant that they are undertaking an urban meal adventure, and hands over a recipe for a ride-on-dinner: join a swarm of cyclists exploring the human body, a swarming social body of cyclists and the body of the city. First to roll up, first for dinner.10 Two different contingent social formations collide as the swarm hovers, extending the public space that has been temporarily inhabited by a crowd around the LiveHouse. The swarm soon gathers the energy of its participants into a repeated circular riding pattern on the adjacent asphalt surface. Once its riders are re-assembled into a circling intensity, the swarm spins off heading south toward the lights of the central city.

---

9 The LiveHouse Light-Out event was the last of a six week pattern that involved word, song, shadowplay, resident video stories, coffee ceremony and micro-market stalls. My artistic direction provided a loose structure of gestures, elaborated by the dramaturgic guidance of Mammad Aidani and Claudio Estobar utilizing the improvised material generated by residents and neighbours.

10 The ride-on-dinner is a project of the Cultural Transports Collective. <www.ride-on-dinner.net>
This Estate and its surrounds are populated with amenities and services offered by established social agencies (a school, churches, a mosque, a neighbourhood learning centre, a training centre, youth programs…). The central public spaces of the estate have the volume to accommodate social gathering, yet various inhibitions, prohibitions and daily realities seem to be barriers to widely intermixed social participation in the cosmopolitan social sphere beyond the most readily assumed groupings. Is this fear? Ignorance and assumptions about others? Social isolation, inexperience and lack of confidence? Self-concerned problems or aspirations or lack of interest? Is this even a care or concern? What does seeking a social engagement in mutuality presume? Such questions are afloat, but I don’t pursue my public art practice to propose answers.

The LiveHouse container is opened-up on its north-side. Emerging from the informal market-like atmosphere, six or so residents appear transfixed inside its volume. They occupy space with their bodies in stillness, distinguishing themselves from the flow of surrounding interactions. Is our looking at them seeking to establish identities? Do you find yourself asking if they, and this LiveHouse, and even yourself, belong here? With what power, authority and privilege are these elements situated here?\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{11}\) It is openly acknowledged that two levels of state and local government and a university have officially endorsed and funded the project, yet I persistently resisted the desire of these organisations to have their “logos” attached to the container itself.
A few weeks earlier young boys were throwing rocks in two directions: at a ball on the roof of LiveHouse and at a woman they accused of repeatedly making racist remarks at them. They’d also been regularly climbing atop the container, telling me they loved to climb onto the roof: “its like our own special place where we can tell secrets”. Little transgressions, I think to myself, but perhaps also acts signalling a desire to move beyond the fixity of place, position and identity. Meanwhile the risk-averse local government thinks fearfully of liability. I place a few modest stickers on the LiveHouse: “danger: do not climb”, knowing that it presents an authoritative stance against which youthful life can rebel. The forces of place, identity and authority clearly exist, yet the evolving formal and informal practices around LiveHouse find ways to question the assumptions of certitude. Those residents have drifted from their static, contained positions and are mixing amongst the crowd, amongst the micro-market tables and the Ethiopian coffee ceremony underway.

A woman’s cry pierces the air. “I hate this place! I don’t belong here and neither do you.” Another women cautiously whispers “what are they fighting about?” An older man I’ve never seen before raises his voice: “I’ve been living here for forty years, from Egypt. That this place houses us all, so many different people, it’s a special thing”. A sprightly Somali woman with a micro-market table trading goods from Dubai is telling me that her eldest son lives “just there” but in three months she has not seen him. She lists alcohol, drugs, women, and that Australia is too free a country. She wants to take him to Somalia to his people, where he will have to take responsibility.

Neighbours and passers-by have been joining the gatherings. A couple of graduate students from Columbia, now seeking residency, crossed the road and started sharing Latin percussion rhythms; a thirty-something woman on a working-holiday from Italy, staying opposite the Estate, stumbles into the improvised performances. They come back week after week. The most dedicated and persistent tenant host, who has been in Australia for a decade since leaving Africa, is moving around the crowd. He’s told me that as soon as he finds himself subject to an authority, a hierarchy, or a boss, he is gone. This is not a “community” with a fixed identity, with pre-existing ties or with a prospective longevity. Rather, this social ensemble is a provisional heterotopia: a “being-together of strangers” contingently gathering around their “openness to unassimilated otherness”.12

---

12 This is the dynamic model of community advocated by Iris Marion Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference”, in Nicholson, L. (ed) Feminism / Postmodernism, New York: Routledge, 1990.
event 4

Here at Bordertown we are about as isolated as you can get on the main road system in Australia. Apart from Eucla just up the road, it’s five hundred kilometres or so to the nearest service station town, in two directions, along the Nullarbor Plain. The car is producing a strange noise. We call the Eucla auto-service man to check it out. The verdict: just the air-conditioning motor playing up, so no air-con in this mid forties heat. Pleased that the car can at least still move, we leave the servo station and pull up to the Bordertown Quarantine check point. All our fresh fruit and veg is to be handed over to go in the bin. “You can take the food over the border into Western Australia if it is cut up and peeled,” we are told. “A fruit salad, perhaps.” We drive back a few meters to the roadside shelter and proceed to cut banana, apple, orange, and then peel potatoes and onion ready for camp. After a dubious late-night off-road camp at Snowtown a couple of days earlier (which we later realised was where a series of townsfolk colluded to murder their neighbours and hide their bodies in the disused town bank-vault for the purpose of gaining their welfare benefits) we decided to pitch the tent in the safe’n’sound Eucla caravan park with all the other Nullarbor crossers.
A few hundred kilometres west and we stop at the grand carport of the desert—simply a large roof structure off to the side of the road feeding its run-off into a rainwater tank. Shade! We take up the offer, park under that metal skin, and share the half-planked table with another car of travellers, from Dubbo, chatting with people we’d rarely otherwise get the chance to share the time of day with. Fill up water bottles with surprisingly great rain-water and we are off again.

On the return leg of the cross-Australia journey, re-tracing the line of my own migration, we keep our eyes out for that curious meeting point, that little pre-fab oasis, hoping that we just might encounter some strange fellow travellers again. And we do. It’s curious that in this in-between landscape, where bits of evidence of the crossings of others are scattered around, our car’s starter motor should then and there decide to give up the ghost. The offer of a tow to roll-start in the heat is accepted, and we make it into Eucla caravan park again. Twenty years ago I had a VW beetle with no starter motor for months, so I wasn’t too phased, but this French family wagon is infinitely heavier to push. At least my family of girls will get to know the adventures of road travel.

We call upon our Eucla auto-service man again, talk about the three intervening weeks since we last saw him, and about the well-built Peugeot. But no starter motor parts here mate. Of course the Pug is out of place. I figure one only gets better at doing “roll-starts”. Undeterred, we proceed with a vague plan. I had bought hardwood stakes and paint, and had salvaged cardboard from the Norseman hardware store almost a thousand km’s ago. The girls start painting the cardboard. I start to convert our vegetables into a curry and soak rice in water. We leave the tents set up, roll-start and head the few kilometres into Bordertown. No need to stop at the quarantine checkpoint if heading east, so we pull into that roadside shelter. It’s museum-like display conveys the necessity for the quarantine to protect West Australian produce from bugs, and details on the huge number of tonnes of fruit and vegetables that get binned every year. I hammer four signs into the roadside gravel surface, staggered out over 200 metres, all in the best vernacular of roadside fruit’n’veg signs. The start of a continuous curry simmers in a big cast-iron pot as we wait for any response to our road signs: “Free lunch” … “in exchange for” … “your fruit & veg”… “X”.

It seems there is not much traffic passing through westward for a late lunch. I take the photo for a young German couple on their
surfing safari, who couldn’t resist the roadside limestone “welcome to Western Australia” gateway as a backdrop. But they are too cautious to get friendly enough to accept my offer of food. I befriend the quarantine workers, and learn all about this strange nexus point in the Great Australian Bight. They gladly accept larger than average plates of mixed vegetable curry on rice. We have a few laughs, pack up, and head back to Eucla for the night, before we’ll continue east in the morning. But not without taking a souvenir “Bordertown” tea-towel to wipe the dishes.

My reckoning has two kinds of conditions operating in this LiveHouse project. First is a condition arising from the discreet heavy metal container object plopped onto the estate. The container—and the public art project—could be assumed to be anchoring itself to the site-specificity of its placed location; to presume a pre-existing “community” with which the arts project is to work; to be an allegorical analogue of the modular living units of the estate; to be a signifier that aspires to poetically symbolising something or other (perhaps a sense of the migration, isolation, and the displacement of tenants?); to be a sovereign place for people to gather around commonly shared identifications and the identities that new migrants and tenants may be attracted to.
(their ethnicity, language group, religion, former nationality, age and
gender etc); to be a beacon of solidarity amongst tenants to build a
sense of sharing belonging and pride in the face of change brought
about by the State and private enterprise interests over which they
have little influence. This kind of condition operates with a logic of
enclosure and containment that locates us in an interpretative relation-
ship to the world (and to art), where we are called upon to extract our
own pleasures, meanings and values that are thought to arise from the
objects and subjects of the world.

A further condition arises from the transformation of the container
into an opened and emptied-out vessel with its contents splayed into the
surrounding area. This is a condition of openness: open to the air and
public vision; open to the contest of the public realm; open to forms of
sociality potentially infiltrating, inhabiting and disrupting claimed forms
of sovereignty. This condition operates with a logic of movement, where
the evacuation of place-bound and context-dependent meanings give way
to a proliferation of contingent and emergent relations. It is a condition
that is becoming more commonly described by players in the flows of a
globalised contemporary philosophy and art-world\(^{13}\) as a corollary to the
realities of contemporary migratory movement and the ruptures of place-
ments and displacements of peoples; with the precarity of multiple and
shifting sense of identities and allegiances of people traversing bounda-
ries; with the uncertainty of unsettled attachments to formerly stable
institutions, disciplines of knowledge, and social ways of living. This kind
of condition situates us in an enunciative and performative relationship
to the world (and to art), where meanings take place, in what Irit Rogoff
calls “the where of now”\(^{14}\), by making a form of location through inhabit-
ing temporal duration.

These two conditions may be counterpoised, somewhat simplisti-
cally, as affirming either sedentary certainty or mobile uncertainty, the
centred and authorative or the fragmentary and contested. One may
be attracted to either of these model conditions at different moments,
whether culturally, theoretically, ideologically, intellectually or intuitively.
Yet isn’t it common to live with contradictory and entangled attachments
to both? It is compelling to recognise, as Jan Luc Nancy does in his
book Being Singular Plural, the oppressive, bloody atrocities that are

\(^{13}\) Nicholas Bourriaud’s recent elaboration of altermodernity and the radicant is a rhetorical
argument of this corollary. See The Radican, New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2009;
Altermodern, London: Tate Publishing, 2009. This line of thought owes much to the earlier
articulation of nomadic thought by Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, Nomadology: The War

committed under the attachments to sovereign identities of nation, religion and ethnic group. We might argue against the accumulation of power, privilege and knowledge by the centripetal forces of sovereign entities—even by acknowledging the privilege that underwrites our (at least my) capacity to think this as such. Yet the challenge for socially engaged public art, as I pursue it, is to work with the interplay of these two co-existing conditions. An iterative pattern of actions, gestures, spatial and temporal arrangements building upon a physical infrastructure and a play of hospitality relations provides a loose artistic carriage for the LiveHouse project. Playful placements and displacements of hospitality conventions have the relative positioning of who belongs here as “host” or “guest”, as performer or as audience, as simultaneously both affirmed and negated in a play of ambivalence. The situation is set in which surprising events may emerge.

**event 5**

In a distracted moment of “logging on” to a computer I incorrectly enter my password, hit the return key, then feel a sudden jolt. I recognise my action. I’ve unknowingly altered a few letters of the password. In so doing, I’ve changed this word from a place name of my childhood, to letters that combine to a completely different word: “carried”.

Recognising this new word has me feel struck by a momentary, delightful sense of carriage. In response to the regular technological demand to verify identity, I had been employing the name of a fixed childhood location as my mnemonic device. My distraction had me shift from citing this place name—a noun referring to my geographic and genealogical origins—to citing an adverb that located my “identity” in a state of process. Whereas I had been presenting my “essential” identity on demand, the jolt has me feel a sense of being subject to mysterious forces larger than my own willful “agency”.

---

LiveHouse tenant and neighbour improvised shadowplay performance, Carlton 2010, photo tenant host.

LiveHouse Carlton 2010, photo Mick Douglas.
“We are all migrating south now!” a tenant calls loudly. The doors on the north side of the LiveHouse container are being closed. “Come! We’re going south!” Hosts assemble objects onto trolleys. People start carrying stools, tables and things with them in the reduced light of dusk. A young woman raps a jibe that spurs the momentum. It’s an evolving practice that has become inscribed now week after week. The doors to the south-side of the LiveHouse container are opened as people arrive. A screen hangs in front of the container’s volume. The things, people and their relations gather into another temporary arrangement. Human figures appear in shadow silhouette on the screen. Our looking toward them is denied an attempt to establish their identity: we see absences of identities.

**event 6**

Make a play-list of tactical aesthetic practices taking place here and now:

1. Generate open-ended infrastructure and social processes that afford participation, formation, transportation and transformation.

2. Play a dynamic tension of simultaneity between sovereignty and hospitality, containment and release, continuity and contiguity, subsumption and suspension, politics and aesthetics.

3. Animate, amplify and intensify the dynamics of moments, movements and momentum.

4. Reflexively transform creative practice through the agency of creative practice.

5. Inhabit an embodied engagement with urban rhythms.

6. Feel the way for preferred entrainment effects of living with urban ecosystems.

7. Afford the surprising possibilities of encounter.

8. With rested-ness, move again.

“What we are doing here in this LiveHouse project is unedited, it is live”, says one host. There is an aesthetic practice in operation here, activating modes of enlivened inhabitation that disrupt and deterritorialise the tendencies of accumulating essentialist local identity and authority of place. Moments of live encounter flash and flicker with the contradictory tensions of location/dislocation, presence/absence and individuals/collectives.
event 7
As I write, an unidentified, persistent water leak is creating a sodden carpet swamp in my studio. In the last four weeks a wet water flood-line has slowly crept from one side of the room towards me, then receded, approached, receded. Now it is under me and in me. The landlord is unresponsive.

As I write, people in Pakistan are experiencing a flood of catastrophic proportion.

As I write, I’m drifting away in memory of Spalding Gray’s performance in his show “Swimming to Cambodia”.

Now it is “lights-out” for LiveHouse: it’s the end of the summer intervention into Carlton Housing Estate life. One host reckons the project changed the sense of what is possible on the Estate. The doors to the LiveHouse container are closed and a single spotlight illuminates a woman sitting on its roof under the moonlit sky. Shadow figures appear in the illuminating grille windows of the container in the foreground, whilst lit windows in the estate’s towers behind signal the larger assembly of lives being lived. A conjunction of collectivity briefly aroused, yet not contained.

Attention gathers focus as her body makes sounds that echo between the towers of the estate. Her mumbling and breathing of a hybridised life of mixing identities, multiple migrations, musical leanings and a cosmopolitan urban life are amplified for all to hear. She muses in song: “n o b o d y   s a i d   i t   w a s   e a s y ”, floating in a moonlit inner-city public housing estate.
TRAVELLING
TRAVELLING — The potential of socially-engaged public art practice
The potential of socially-engaged public art practice

From: mick.douglas@rmit.edu.au
Date: Wed, 6 Oct 2010
To: 
Subject: Invitation to celebrate our work! Wed 20 October

Hi 

The arts projects that I’ve been doing in the last decade have also been part of my practice-based phd research. Well, the time has come to wrap up the phd side of this with an examination presentation event and exhibition. I am calling the work “CARRIAGE: cultural transports and transformations of a socially-engaged public art practice”.

The kind of creative collaborative relationship that I’ve enjoyed with you is very much a core part of my work. I want to invite you, and a few other people in Melbourne who’ve been important collaborators with me, to join in being a part of my phd presentation event.

The event on Wednesday 20th October morning will be like this:

9am – I invite you (and other key collaborators) and my phd examiners to meet me at a location near RMIT in central Melbourne, where my mobile exhibition will be in small boxes. I invite you all to carry a small box that is light and easily manageable. We will make our way as a group through the 2 - 3 blocks to Guildford Lane Gallery (near corner Elizabeth and Latrobe Sts) whilst we are able to engage with the exhibition as we move. I hope it will be a fun celebration together, as well as being a gesture that acknowledges your collaboration with me (and my gratitude to you.)

10am – with the exhibition now in the gallery, I will make a solo performance presentation based around the projects Tramjatra, W-11 tram, ride-on-dinner and LiveHouse. You are most welcome to stay for this. I encourage you to, if you can, but I understand if you cannot.

11am – the examiners get to ask me questions and I respond one way or another!

12noon – finish.

I understand that a Wednesday morning is not the most convenient time for a lot of people, so I completely understand if this is not viable for you to join. But I nevertheless want to invite you on the chance that you might be interested and able to join. It would be great if you can let me know asap (by next Monday 11th) as I need to plan for the number of people sharing the carrying.

And let me know if you’ve got any queries about it all.

Thanks, mick
CARRIAGE
cultural transports and transformations of a socially-engaged
public art practice
Mick Douglas

phd event - Wed 20 Oct

TO MEET BY 9.00am
Swanston St pavement / opposite A’Beckett St
50 metres north of RMIT building 8 main entrance
(***look out for a three-wheeled pedalled vehicle).

Collaborators and examiners will join Mick and proceed together at
9.15am to carry the project mobile exhibition walking two city blocks to
the examination venue.

Coffee will be on at the venue. Examination presentation commences
at 10am - Guildford Lane Gallery, 20-24 Guildford Lane.

Thanks for coming!
Carriage event 20th October 2010, gathering on the main street of RMIT University's Melbourne city campus, photo Rochus Hinkel.
Carriage event 20th October 2010, gathering on the main street of RMIT University's Melbourne city campus, photos Brittany Veitch & Rochus Hinkel.
Carriage event 20th October 2010, departing with the mobile exhibition, photos Brittany Veitch & Rochus Hinkel.
Carriage event 20th October 2010, Swanston Street Melbourne, photo Brittany Veitch.
Carriage event 20th October 2010, walking Melbourne, photo Rochus Hinkel.
Carriage event 20th October 2010, walking Melbourne, photos Rochus Hinkel and Brittany Veitch.
Carriage event 20th October 2010, Mick Douglas performance, Guildford Lane Gallery, Melbourne, photo Rochus Hinkel.
Carriage event 20th October 2010, Mick Douglas exhibition performance, Guildford Lane Gallery, Melbourne, photos Rochus Hinkel (top) & Ramesh Ayyar (bottom).
Carriage event 20th October 2010, Mick Douglas exhibition performance, Guildford Lane Gallery, Melbourne, photos Ramesh Ayyar.
Carriage event 20th October 2010, Mick Douglas performance, Guildford Lane Gallery, Melbourne, photo Ramesh Ayyar.
LUGGAGE
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bishop, Claire, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” *October* 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51-80.


Clemens, Justin & Pettman, Dominic, “Public Transport: Jaunting from the Spaceship Nomad to the HSS Tampa”, in *Avoiding the Subject: Media, Culture and the Object*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.


Douglas, Mick (dir.) pìyà zìndàgì hai / love is life, 12 mins, 2006. (video from the first season of W-11 Tram.)


Douglas, Mick. “Other Ways With Wheels”, Thinking on Two Wheels Cycling Conference proceedings 2007, University of South Australia.


Hage, Ghassan, “The real, the potential and the political”, Tsoutas, Nicholas (ed.)
Knowledge+Dialogue+Exchange: remapping cultural globalisms from the south, Sydney:


Hsi Liu, Ban, Scenarios for the public bicycle in Melbourne, Master of Design by project, RMIT University, 2005.


Lonetwin, of Pigs and Lovers, from The Days of the Sledge Hammer Have Gone, self published catalogue 2005.
Lonetwin, <www.lonetwin.com>


Muecke, Stephen, No Road (bitumen all the way) Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1997.

Muecke, Stephen, No Road (bitumen all the way) Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1997.


Peran, Marti, Post-it Cities: occasional urbanities, Barcelona: the Centre De Cultura Contemporania De Barcelona, 2008.


Rogoff, Irit “We - Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations” <http://theater.kein.org/node/95>.


Superflex, <www.superflex.dk>


Tramjatra – project credits

cô-ordinator / conductor / artist: Mick Douglas
produced by: tramtactic
conductor / performer: Roberto D’Andrea
technical co-ordination 2001: Roberto D’Andrea
critical passengers 2001: Suzie Attiwill and Jogi Panghaal.
conducting 2001: Roberto D’Andrea, Prabir Kumar Goswami, Andy Miller and tram conductors of Kolkata and Melbourne.
Kolkata 2001 forum and event participants: Arunendu Banerjee, Manish Chakraborti, Greenwaves School of Art and Craft, Professor S.K. Rakshit and architecture students at Jadavpur University, S.V. Raman, V. Ramaswamy, Shyamal Sengupta.
Kolkata 2001 production management: Pallavi Biswas
Melbourne 2001 production management: Philip Wadds
print design: Neal Haslem in Melbourne and Lisa Young and Ranajay Gupta in Kolkata.
book design: Neal Haslem
website design: Neal Haslem
tram track technical advisor: Mike McGufficke
patua advisor and translator: S.R. Rajen
“shared lung” public art performance intervention: Mick Douglas
“shared lung” shirt production: Tomorrow Foundation, Kolkata.
“tracing tramjatra” performance intervention: Mick Douglas
photography: Jogi Panghaal, Mick Douglas, Swaroop Majunder.
video: Mick Douglas & Mahadeb Shi.
communication design: Neal Haslem

RMIT University student participation
tramjatra 2001 interdisciplinary design studio
students: Geoff Binder, Julian Canterbury, Yuen Ping Tai and Annette Warner in both Kolkata and Melbourne; and Lisa de Jong, Rory Fitzwilliams Hyde, Chris Moore and Sophie Zelder in Melbourne.

tramjatra has been supported by Australia Council for the Arts, Victorian Minster for Transport & the Department of Infrastructure, Arts Victoria, City of Melbourne, Australia India Council, RMIT School of Architecture + Design, West Bengal Minister for Transport & Sport, Calcutta Tramways Company Inc. and Accord Advertising.
Ride-on-dinner – project credits

**project concept / artist:** Mick Douglas  
**project development 2006:** Kate Archdeacon, Mick Douglas, Ceri Hann.  
**project development 2007-2010:** Cultural Transports Collective—Kate Archdeacon, Ceri Hann, Neal Haslem, Lynda Roberts, Rob Eales, Anthony Hamilton-Smith, Ben Landau.  
**qualified chefs:** Kate Archdeacon, Anthony Hamilton-Smith.  
**shepherding cyclist coordinator:** Damon Rao

**kitchen vehicle (first prototype 2006)**  
**concept:** Mick Douglas  
**design & fabrication:** Pedal Powered Vehicle Workshop (PPVW) participants.

**change vehicle (second prototype 2007)**  
**concept:** Mick Douglas with Ben Goodall (Trisled)  
**chassis & drive train design & development:** Ben Goodall (Trisled)  
**kitchen box design & fabrication:** Rainer Hoenniger, Nirmal Kumar Menon, Ryan Van Den Dolder.  
**kitchen & cargo box detail design development & fabrication:** Jason Parmington.

**RMIT University student participation:**  
**pedal powered vehicle workshop (PPVW) 2006 summer intensive course**  
**tutors:** Mick Douglas, Shreya Gadepalli, Matteo Martignoni, Ceri Hann.  
**students:** Luca Abate, Kate Arch Deacon, Simon Doran, Liam Prescott.  
**Community participants:** Bill Bretherton, Michael Drofenik, Adrian Flather, Hun-chul Choi, Sam Johnstone, Anne McLean, Peter Mitchell, James Lyon, Luke von Bamberger.

**change vehicle 2007 design studio course**  
**tutor:** Mick Douglas  
**students:** Chip Ariff Aiman Mohammad Azmi, Kei Kai Fung, Rainer Hoenniger, Aran Kamonchan, Nirmal Kumar Menon, Anara Mailybayeva, Liam Prescott, Himaka Sema, Ryan Van Den Dolder, Michelle Vanspall, Eshaa Venkatesh, Dylan Willcock.

**slow food kitchen trailer design & fabrication:** Anthony Hamilton-Smith

**photography:** Ceri Hann, Jacob Walker, Karen Trist.  
**video:** Mick Douglas, Ben Landau, Luca Abate.  
**website & communication design:** Neal Haslem

**RoD #1 co-hosts:** Pedal Powered Vehicle Workshop participants.  
**RoD #2 co-hosts:** Pedal Powered Vehicle Workshop participants.  
**RoD #3 co-hosts:** Architects for Peace / RMIT Change Vehicle design studio students.  
**RoD #4 co-hosts:** Craft Victoria Gallery.  
**RoD #5 co-hosts:** OSW and the West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial.

**ride-on-dinner has been supported by** RMIT University Industrial Design program and the co-hosts of each dinner.
W-11 Tram – project credits

**project concept / artist:** Mick Douglas
**produced by:** tramtactic

**season 1 project coordinators:** Mick Douglas, Melbourne & Durriya Kazi, Karachi.
**commissioned by:** Festival Melbourne 2006 the Cultural Festival of the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games.
**vehicle decoration team:** Nusrat Iqbal, Muhammed Arshad, Muhammad Nadeem, Safdar Ali and assistants Rob Eales, Sophie Gaur, Carl Thornton.
**production coordinator, photographer & videographer:** Vajid Ali Arain
**ticket poetry:** un-attributed popular Urdu poetry from vehicles of Pakistan, translated to English by Durriya Kazi.

**exhibition in Karachi 2006:** VM Gallery, Rangoonwala Community Center.

**season 2 project coordinator:** Mick Douglas
**production assistant:** Rob Eales
**onboard hosting artists:** Syed Muhammad Ahsan, Roberto D’Andrea, Mick Douglas, Rob Eales, Khalid Jamil, Salabat Khan, Imran Kurd, Khurram Shabir Rathod.
**photography:** Karen Trist, Frank Stryk, Ceri Hann, Mick Douglas, Wajid Ali.
**video:** Mick Douglas, Vajid Ali, Marsha Berry and passengers.
**website & communication design:** Neal Haslem
**website development:** Reuben Braithwaite, Meredith Kirby.

W-11 Tram first season—Festival Melbourne 2006—was supported by the Victorian Government’s Office of the Commonwealth Games Co-ordination, Yarra Trams, United Group Rail Pty Ltd and staff of the Preston Service Centre, Concept Engineering, Stephen Braham, the Victorian Government’s Department of Infrastructure and the Rail Tram & Bus Union, Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, RMIT University, University of Karachi. **Produced by** Global Art Projects.

W-11 Tram second season—summer 2006-2007—was supported by VicHealth, City of Melbourne, Victorian Multicultural Commission, Yarra Trams, Rail Tram & Bus Union (Victoria), RMIT University. **Auspiced by** Auspicious Art Projects.
LiveHouse – project credits

concept and artistic direction: Mick Douglas
supporting artists: Mammad Aidani, Amie Batalibasi, Mama Dosa, Claudia Estobar, Jorge Levia, Ruth Rogers Wright, Fadil Suna.
LiveHouse modified shipping container design: Jason Parmington, Mick Douglas and RMIT University students of Industrial Design with estate tenants.
project coordinators: Fiona O’Grady, Donna Kennedy, Michael McMahon, Trudy Hayter.
project assistants: Rob Eales & Jess Bird.
website & communication design: Neal Haslem
photography: Angela Bailey, Rob Blackburn, Jacob Walker.
video: Jean-Paul Tansey, Ramesh Ayyar, Ben Landau.

RMIT University Student Participation:

LiveHouse vehicles 2008 design studio course
tutors: Jason Parmington & Mick Douglas; workshop: Andy McKlusky

share 2008 design studies course
tutor: Mick Douglas
students: Wan Lee Foo, Christopher Hayes-Kossmann, Ko Wei Ho, Ben Hurt, Winaya Suwarnaga Kamaputri, Joshua Kua, Elisa Kutsuwada Madeira de Carvalho, Ellyse Mclinnes, James Patrick, Tristan Tait, Di Tan, Ellen Grace Tanoemarga, Youssef Tayeb, Rene Walk, Hui Ming Wong, Elaine Yi Ling Yeo.

motion emotion 2009 design studies course
tutor: Mick Douglas

LiveHouse modified shipping container 2009 design studio course
tutors: Jason Parmington & Mick Douglas
students: Iain Archibald, Jessica Bird, William Campbell, Benjamin Creek, Samantha Duzenman, Greg Halliday, Ingrid Jager, Patrick O’Connell, Sebastiaan Pijnappel, Simone Steel, Inge Thomassen.

LiveHouse was part of the Carlton Flats Arts Project produced by the City of Melbourne Community Cultural Development Program in partnership with RMIT University School of Architecture & Design, supported by the Office of Housing.
APPENDICES

Included with the examiner hard copy version of this document is:

**Book**  Douglas, Mick (ed).  

**Tools**  
*Tramjatra tickets*  
*ride-on-dinner* tickets and napkin  
*W-11 Tram* summer season 2006-2007 tickets & program  
*LiveHouse* cards