

Autosuggestion

a work of theatre/archaeology in nine episodes

Pearson|Shanks

Friday June 28 7:30 PM in the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (the d.school).

For the 2013 meetings of Performance Studies International, and supported by the Revs Program at Stanford.

Just what is an automobile?

In this new work of theatre/archaeology — the rearticulation of fragments of the past as real-time event — Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks offer reflections on an itinerary that takes them from rural Lincolnshire in the 1950s through the industrial north of England and south Wales to California today. Along the way they comment on windshields and upholstery, nausea and the body politic, mirrors and engine parts, landscapes and the sublime, urban surveillance and provocation, door catches and handles, murder and assassination. In the background sits Bill Barranco's 1956 Chevy in black primer paint with V8 hot-rodded big-block.

And it all hangs from the realization that things are never what they seem.

MP and MS arrive in a '56 Chevy hotrod and lead the audience through to the atrium that connects the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design (Stanford University's d.school) with the Design Division of the School of Engineering.

One. Lifecycle



MS

This is Bill Barranco's Chevrolet.

One of the "Tri Five" Chevrolets from '55, '56, '57, this model 150 was built in Oakland in 1956 to a modest spec and has always been in the Bay Area.

Here, photographed in Bill's shop, is the original "stove-bolt" inline 6 engine — which most of the Chevys came with then. There was an overhead valve V8 offered as an option — the famous Chevy small-block. That performance-oriented engine is still with us today, albeit evolved, at the heart of the Corvette. 50 years and more of engine making for affordable cars — Chevrolet said "we are the heartbeat of America".

Bill replaced the inline 6 when he remade the car just a few years ago. He hasn't restored so much as remade this 1956 Chevy in 2010 as a 1970 hotrod, stripping it down and fitting a 1964 409 big-block.



The Tri Five Chevys have come to be iconic 50s American car design, and almost accidentally. The '55 was something of a compromise for the designers, while the '56 was how the designers meant it to look, and that's why Bill has one of them. Chevrolet didn't have enough money to launch what eventually became the '58 Chevy; they cut corners and made do with the '57, which ironically became the most iconic of them all, appearing alongside Marilyn Monroe as the symbol of everything American.

The Chevrolet 150 typically came with few extras, and maybe even without a back seat. Perhaps it began painted in one of the characteristic two-tone pastel color mixes more popular in the Bel-Air package — pale red or baby blue with cream accents and roof, and plenty of chrome trim. Here it is instead in minimalist black primer paint — enough to stop the steel rusting, more than enough to have the character of the car show most cleanly. And it has no back seat.



MP

It's 1953. It must be a test drive: the paintwork is still fresh. I look pleased to be joining the world of motorists, men mostly: of grandfather, father, uncles ...

But gripping the windscreen: not yet quite sure of the controls.



Later, my hand is on the wheel; sturdy-legged, I'm built for pedal power ...



Seems as if I'm even mastering reverse: though traction is as much through feet scabbling on the pavement as mastery of the controls ...



Here proudly, trouser creases razor-sharp, in front of Granddad Shaw's 1946 Vauxhall 14 — CVY381 — its stamped-metal Hackney Carriage plate clearly visible: registered to carry four passengers.

Cabman, grocer, fish-fryer: he was nothing if not an entrepreneur. Every Friday, Uncle Wilf and Uncle Stan would deliver fish and chips to the surrounding villages in the largest of his fleet: the one with a glass partition — that in its former life as a limousine had prevented the chauffeur listening in — and fold-up seats in the floor; that was regularly pressed into service to transport most of the local football team, the Hibaldstow Hotspurs. Though once the footbrake failed, and Alan Portess had to work the handbrake while Granddad pumped the clutch and clung on desperately to the wheel: as did the football team to each other — and to the aristocratic straphangers.

Local residents would phone in, and the orders would be made up and wrapped diagonally in two sheets of newspaper, the name of the caller written across the free corner. These were then stacked vertically in an old baker's bread tray and shrouded in two thick, brown, evil-smelling army blankets

in the capacious boot — or trunk as some of you would have it. On these trips, we'd to listen to the car radio, with its horizontal dial and Bakelite knobs. Adults laughing at “The Navy Lark”, “The Goon Show” — “I’m der famous Eccles”; and we too, in emulation ...

Cars and comedy: sealed together in an unlikely envelope of memory.



Smokey autos: both inside, and out ...

Before the bans on public smoking; before unleaded petrol ...

A time when Herbert Hudson had to “decarbonize” the taxis — sorry the cabs —regularly: with a wire brush, in a daylong job ...

Before anti-freeze: paraffin lamps hung in the engine blocks on winter’s nights, to prevent them cracking ...



Always Vauxhalls: with exotic names — Velox, Wyvern, Victor, Cresta — and increasing expanses of chrome, to be polished and buffed. General Motors, thinly disguised. Uncle Wilf had one of these, then one of these ...



Column gearshifts. Rudimentary synchromesh — arcane practices like double-declutching still required. With no power steering: heavy handling. Bench front seats: no safety belts. Under hard braking, my father would fling his left arm sideways — to prevent us flying through the windscreen. As I too still do, in an inculcated reflex ...



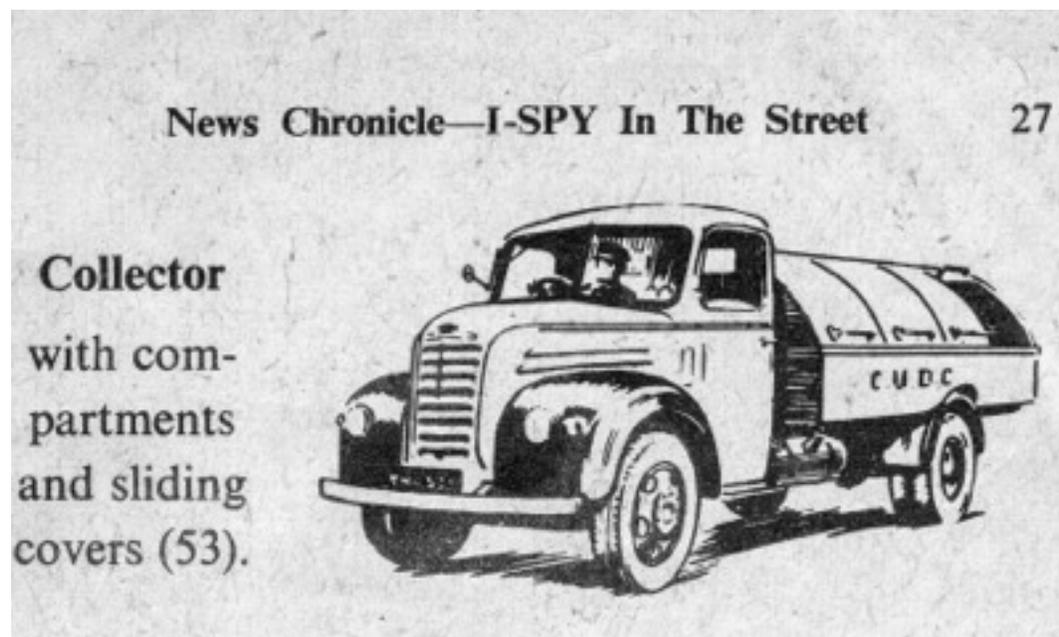
Uncle Wilf must be out there, in the road, also squatting, with his Kershaw “Raven” folding camera. But he’ll be all right. He’ll hear anything coming — grinding gears, blowing exhaust — long before he sees it. And, by the look of my new coat, it’s probably Sunday anyway. That’ll have to come off before we start washing the taxis: “You don’t want to get it mucky, duck”.

We often sat here — two of us, three of us — waving at passing lorries: “Well you wouldn’t miss any!” says me Mam. From, from ... not from here anyway. Only later — after we’d learned our letters — did we realize that by using Wilf’s discarded, out-of-date, custard-yellow Automobile Association handbook, we could identify where they came from, from the last two characters of their number-

plates: places close — JV, Grimsby; others far-distant — KG, Cardiff. Granddad's CVY? From the Severn Valley or Worcester, wherever they are: a world expanding.

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Vau.

And there in the book's gazetteer is Layne's Garage, Brigg — our garage — with its tiny, breakdown-truck symbol. And beneath it 'Vau' for Vauxhall.



But the I-Spy book "In The Street", a childhood guide to spotting everyday items, a guide to vernacular surveillance, was a dead loss here: not many one-man bands or pavement artists in the village, though we always knew when the "dilly-men" were around, collecting the bins of human excrement, in their truck with "compartments and sliding covers", before mains drainage was installed.



Granddad still drove until close to his death, even after developing twin cataracts: usually straddling the central white line to guide himself ...

This is his brother Great Uncle Fred and his Hillman: just after topping up the radiator.

Two. Host and Ghost



MS

In Monte Hellman's 1971 movie *Two Lane Blacktop* it's a souped up 1955 Chevy. Bill's Chevy is haunted by this media ghost — big block, black primer, pared down.

There's "Driver" James Taylor (singer-songwriter), and "Mechanic" Dennis Wilson (of the Beach Boys), both in their first and only movie roles. The Beach Boys enjoyed their association with hot-rodding and even had a famous song about the 409 engine. James Taylor later sang "Our Town", a Randy Newman song, in Disney/Pixar's 2006 movie "Cars". With "Girl" Laurie Bird they are drag racing their way east from LA and meet "GTO", a sleazy salesman played by Warren Oates. He's driving a Judge Pontiac — a high-performance Pontiac GTO in "The Judge" package. The Judge name was Pontiac's marketing idea and came from a comedy routine, "Here Come de Judge", used repeatedly on the Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In TV show. I remember it well as a complete cultural mystery when the series arrived in the UK as a cheap TV import. The Judge routine itself, made popular by legendary showman Sammy Davis Junior, was borrowed from the act of long-time burlesque entertainer Dewey "Pigmeat" Markham. The Chevy and The Judge start racing across the US for "pink slips" — ownership of the vehicles being driven.

There's ambiguity around the GTO in the movie. It is all in the details — we are told by the characters that we are looking at an Orbit Orange 1970 GTO with a 455 engine and Turbo Hydramatic transmission. And indeed we might be, but the car carries only some of the Judge

graphics package. It may have the 455 big block option, but, if so, the fender badge is missing; GTO tells us that the car has 390 horse power, yet no Pontiac was available that year with that rating.

The Pontiac GTO was the original muscle car, named, sacrilegiously to some, after the Ferrari GTO (now the most expensive car of all time). General Motors' Pontiac Division Head John Delorean approved the idea in 1964 as an option on a Pontiac LeMans (after the race track). It came with a big "triple deuce" 389 engine — with two barrel carburetors. (In the UK in the 60s and 70s Triumph were making a range of sporty saloons. We thought the Triumph 1500 "TC" — with twin single barrel carbs — was quite exotic!)

Competition for the GTO came from the likes of Ford Mustangs and Plymouth Road Runners (names making reference to media versions of the American west — a wild horse, of course, and that diminutive, albeit wily and resourceful, cartoon character).

The Pontiac is a stark contrast to the '55 Chevy — gimmicky, slick and tacky in comparison to the minimalist, somewhat brutal, completely custom-built home-made hot-rod with dual quad tunnel ram 454 engine, 4-speed manual transmission, and with black primer paint, like Bill's. The genealogy of the Chevy in Two Lane Blacktop is quite different to the GTO. You bought the GTO at the dealership. If you knew what you were doing you could fit a Chevy big block 409 or bigger truck engine, bought second hand, into a lightweight body — a Tri Five Chevy did nicely — add modifications like two four-throat carbs, Offenhauser manifold, Edelbrock cylinder heads, as Bill has done, and you get a drag racer that has little to do with the car corporation, and nothing to do with any comfortable consumer image they wanted to market.

Of course the movie makes of all of this an allegory — who you are is about how you do what you do. Embodied in the artifact and what you do with it.

Except the movie has little coherence and no neat ending — Driver, Mechanic, Girl and GTO just seem to lose interest and head on out of the movie.



MP

By the late 1970s, the UK car industry was in precipitous decline: racked by restrictive practices, bad industrial relations, poor quality of manufacture.

The nadir: the bloated, inept, part-nationalized British Leyland — “BL” — that had swallowed the individual marques: Austin, Morris, Triumph, Jaguar, Rover ...

And in 1981 John Delorean arrived in Northern Ireland as a savior of the industry. Delorean Motors opened a factory in Dunmurry with £100m of British government subsidy, then closed down a year later, having delivered just 7000 gull-winged, stainless steel bodied, plastic interioered cars.

Granted special planning dispensations to help ease local unemployment, Cardiff's Rover car factory opened in 1964: building transmissions for Land Rovers and the P6; later, engines for the 2300 and 2600; and finally, innovative five-speed gearboxes for the Government-funded SD1.

SD? — “Special Division”. It was amazingly voted European Car of the Year 1977, though that was before anyone had driven it very far.

In January 1978, SD1 production was halted for 24 hours after six inspectors walked out, symptomatically, in protest at the color of their overalls — they were issued with brown overalls when they wanted white — and forty other inspectors struck in sympathy. In February 1980, a strike by seventy gearbox assemblers at the now BL Cardiff stopped production of Rover saloons at Solihull, and Triumph TR7 sports cars at Coventry. But by then such constraints on the company's

ability to supply the market had ceased to matter. Accelerating rapidly downhill: steering faulty, brakes failed, and no Alan Portess to help out.



The Cardiff plant closed in 1984, the Thatcherite project to dismantle UK heavy industry in full swing: no more troublesome unions. Time to stop making things: from now on, the British economy

would consist, we were told, of playing the markets; and three men in a rusty Ford Transit ... Car-crash economics ...



In December 1988, just prior to its demolition, my company Brith Gof staged Gododdin — the first of our large-scale site-specific productions – there.

The earliest Welsh poem, a 6th century battle elegy, in an abandoned car factory.



Military defeat as a thinly veiled allegory for industrial decline ...



Cliff McLucas's scenography was architectonic in nature — constructing another architecture within the existing building — a relationship he later called ghost and host.

Bringing the outside, inside: in a formal arrangement of hundreds of tons of sand; dozens of trees; and thousands of gallons of water, that gradually flooded the performing area during the performance. But the plant was always present, always apparent: seen around, seen through, the constructed setting.

Oily environs: a place designed for dirty work — with enormous quantities of electricity — that allowed and enabled phenomena unusual, undesirable or downright dangerous in the auditorium.

And Cliff used cars, BL cars even — Metro, Maestro, Maxi, Montego and the infamous Allegro (which The Sun newspaper voted “the worst British car ever made”) — most of them in shades of shitty brown. “Non-runners” all: ‘gone for spares’ as they say.

Donated by the local scrap — sorry, breaker's yard; towed in ...

Parked in pairs, in rows ...

Disabled, immobilized: their petrol tanks filled with water ...

Daubed with whitewash ...

Providing illumination with their headlights; and platforms for heroic posturing ...

Mute anachronisms ...

Scenographic elements; become topographic features ...

Derelict, decaying moments in a performance landscape: 6th century, 20th century ...

And we used their dismantled “parts”: swinging tires on ropes in training for battle; carrying bonnets — sorry hoods — as shields, each rigged with a trigger linked to the amplification system: as I strike mine, terrified horses neighed in the soundtrack.



Later, when we restaged the work in Italy and Germany and Holland and Scotland — in a sand quarry, in an ice-hockey stadium — we kept the cars as scenic components, as mnemonics for our political purpose at home. But without a physical enemy in the scenario to confront, we took to attacking them, assaulting their very materiality, muscle against metal: breaking windcreens with oil drums; ripping off doors; rolling a Fiat 500 in Polverigi ...

Leaving a field of wreckage.

The Thatcherite project made manifest.

Welcome to Britain, 1988.

Three. The Transient



We arrived in a red Mercedes 300: favored cruiser of UK wide-boys, the ersatz Jaguar Mark II of the 1990s; all image, all swaggering machismo. A criminal car: night crawler.

And on this night in October 1998, we met a small crowd gathered in a deserted parking lot in Cardiff's dockland, close to the site of the demolished Casablanca Club, that featured in the first of John Williams' trilogy of Cardiff crime novels *Five Bars*, *Three Pubs and a Nightclub*, and that followed his *Bloody Valentine*, an account of the actual murder of Lynette White. The "Casa B": where suspects had congregated ...

This much is certain: in the early hours of 14 February 1988, Lynette White was killed in Flat 1, 7 James Street, above the "Kingsport" bookmakers. She had been stabbed fifty-one times, in a frenzied attack. It was a killing on the cusp, redolent of old ways, in an area being rapidly redeveloped: recast as Cardiff Bay rather than Butetown or, in its more notorious guise, Tiger Bay. There was pressure to solve the crime quickly. Although several witnesses saw a single, white male with bloodied hands on James Street, the event became infamous for the heinous arrest and trial of the Cardiff Three, black men all. In the ensuing furor, Lynette all but disappeared.

On several occasions, I've tried to tell her story: this once, here at site.

I wore a radio microphone. As I began to move around the vicinity but out of immediate earshot — pointing out places, naming names, committing inadvisable acts of speculation; fifty yards from Butetown police station, one hundred yards from 7 James Street; occasionally caught in the Mercedes's headlights, casting great shadows on the surrounding, surviving Victorian architecture — the audience clustered around the car. Surprisingly, they could hear my voice on its stereo system; it was linked to a radio receiver in the boot— sorry, trunk.

It was a useful combination: radio mike and car radio. Our colleague Eddie Ladd used it in her Bonnie and Clyde — the audience sitting in a circle of cars, listening to performers at the center: drive-in performance ...

Here, the audience was at the heart of the matter: in the area where I had worked for two years; where I too gave a sample of blood in April 1991, as part of the mass DNA screening in a second murder, possibly linked.

A monologue to tell Lynette's story: working from this tenuous moment of personal involvement: to disentangle an event in which so many were implicated. My text included details from family recollections, character testimonies, media articles, eyewitness accounts, police interviews, pathologist's reports, scene-of-crime reconstructions. I called it "Body of Evidence"; or "Lynette"; or "Blood" ...



These are some of the words I spoke. First as apologia: Why? Perhaps because I am not separate from it. It happened on my landscape, the place that the BBC's "Panorama" report made look like Weegee's Naked City: "The past still clings stubbornly to these damp streets."

Then later, as explication: And so the fictions begin: “Every answer and statement was filled with half-truths, half-lies, and self-justifications.” “The truth about how she died is shrouded by the murky gloom of the world in which she lived. In a world of secrecy and deceit, questions from outside go unanswered.” Sure, there were lies, contradictions, changes, additions. At first, it was as if everyone was trying out stories to see if they would stick, to other stories — editing, trimming, rewriting. But then it moved on and James Street became a stage-set upon which everyone was free to choreograph and direct the behaviors, actions, and motives of the protagonists: to create the scenario; to write the dialogue; to give oneself a starring role; to use scenes and characters from other times, other places. Eyewitnesses did it. Defendants did it. Police did it. I do it too.

I speak urgently, anticipating the passing glance that lingers and becomes a threat: “For time has not healed here, it’s still raw.”

But sound and vision have come apart here: my voice at the car, my actions over there. And if anything goes off, if our presence turns unwanted intrusion, our plan is simply to switch off the radio.

Trying to recover Lynette, at that time with no easy answers ...

In one of those leftover spaces of motoring ...

But no one in Butetown really seemed to know anything: “Prostitute murders are often difficult to solve: too many casual contacts, too much furtive behavior.”

So off and way into the night, to a thumping dub reggae soundtrack: hit-and-run performance ...

Of Body of Evidence, I have no video footage, only Michael’s photograph of James Street on a wet evening: “The past still clings stubbornly to these damp streets.”

A gated car park also now occupies the footprint of the Casa B: making way for the motors ...





MS

The road, the port and docks, have always been about transiency. Passing through, moving on.

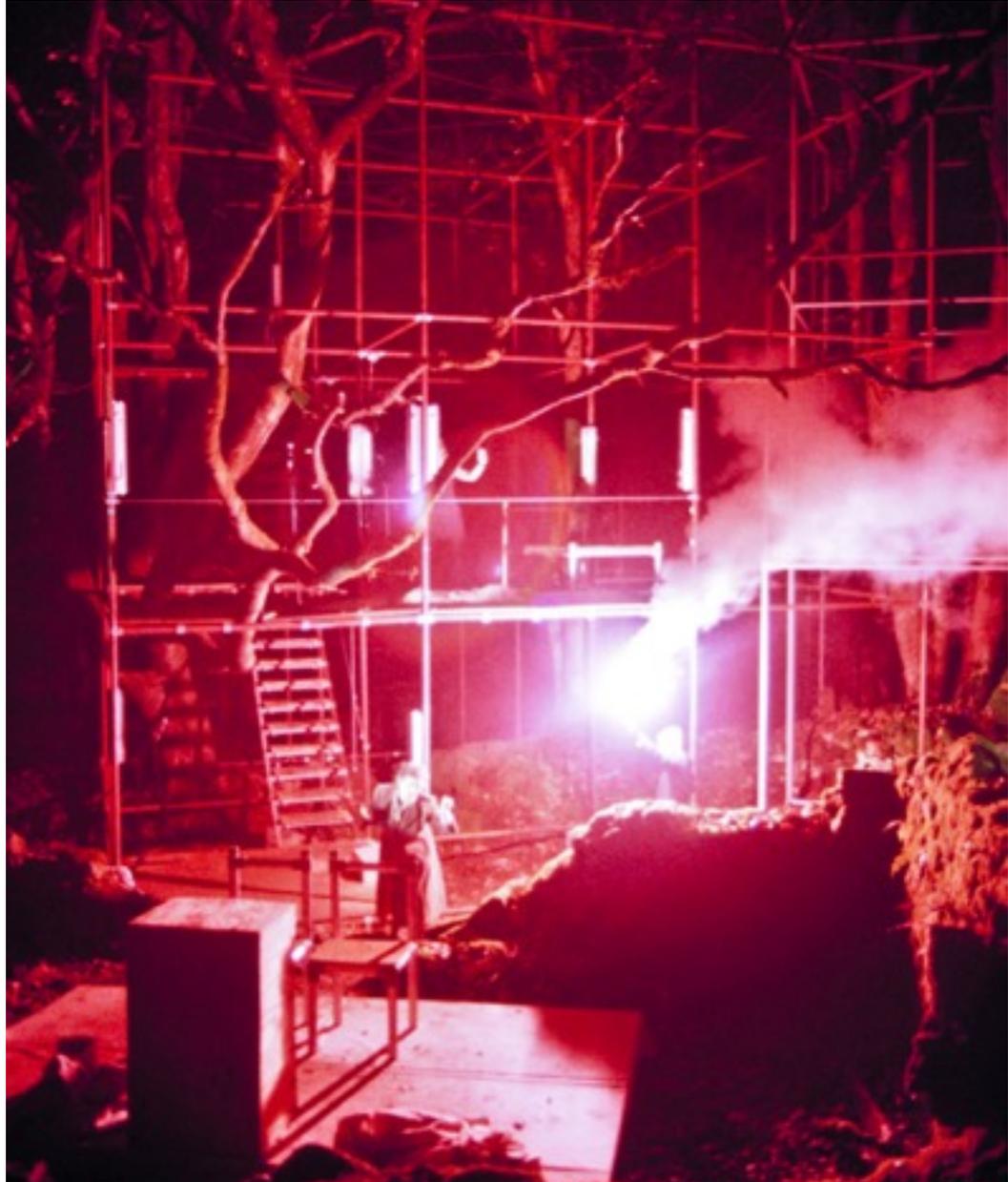
The car, of course, embodies this in a particular way. We look out through the windshield, the glass, the mirror. Everything is framed. The frame is what gives significance to whatever it is that we witness as we drive past.

Screens and frames — drive-in movies, with the movie on screen framed by windshield. Even the great evangelical churches of America are completely dependent upon the parking lot, and have adopted the staging of the mass performance — assembled massed crowds watching the diminutive distant figure of the preacher enlarged on screen.

Drive-in, drive-past experience. Screen and frame make sense of the indeterminacy of the transient, the ephemerality of experience — making a statement and moving on — finding significance in event and report — with the artifact, the car, as an agent in witnessing.



Screens and frames are central to such forensic potentials — allowing the possibility of constructing narrative out of what might just pass by, out of the transiency and indeterminacy. Though the result in Cardiff was that the Police framed those convicted for Lynette's murder in a notorious miscarriage of justice.



Tri Bywyd, “Three Lives”, a work by Brith Gof, was a drive-in performance — the audience was brought in by coach to the farmstead that acted as host for the event, several miles up a forest track. Cliff, our scenographer, built two sixteen-meter scaffolding cubes through the ruin and trees, after a tactic and conceit of French architect Bernard Tschumi. And so the set framed three scenarios — Lynette, the case displaced from docklands Cardiff out here to the rural west; Sarah Jacob, the “Fasting Girl of Wales” who, in the 1860s apparently lived without eating and drinking, and was starved to death when medical authorities came to investigate, locked her in her bedroom and observed what happened; and a story of the hosting site — a farmer driven to suicide through poverty and isolation.

Four. Nomadic experience

MP



On this night in September 2001, forty spectators arrived at Chapter Art Center's Studio Theatre. Twenty immediately left us, setting out into the night in five of that *mélange* of bangers and jalopies that are Cardiff's taxis: a fleet that, at this time, even included Russian Ladas.

MS

Why do Ladas have heated rear windows? To keep your hands warm when you're pushing.

How do you work out the value of a used Lada? Find out how much gas there's in the tank.

What do you call a Lada with a sunroof? A dumpster.

MP

The spectators set off in search of four performers — two men, two women — and a photographer, at large in the city: different audiences doing different things simultaneously — transported literally, and we hoped, figuratively.

At five separate locations — dockside, coffee shop, dancehall, bar, hotel room — taxi travellers met performers who were often engaged in actions with an unsuspecting public: serving in a café; dancing in a club. Their task: to identify the performer, and to record them for precisely five minutes

on video and Polaroid. Whilst negotiating their own presence in the public domain, they listened to pleas and protestations and promises, and observed scenes of intrigue, mystery, and provocation.

Unwitting passengers on journeys to locales off the beaten track; their unanticipated progress providing shifting views and unexpected experiences: prospects of the city they may never have beheld before. Performance: on the road, beginning to motor ...



And in one moment, a performer on the street flagged down a passing taxi and got in.

She was recorded as she looked out onto, narrated, responded to, scenes of the passing city. Friday night in Cardiff: only a car door away, but distanced, framed up, on screen, rendered filmic.

These travelers returned with dubious pieces of this and that — poorly shot videos, underexposed photographs — purporting to show that and this: evidence that something, perhaps momentous, was happening out there, slightly beyond our capacity to apprehend it. With descriptions of places visited, conversations overheard, half-heard, misheard. Like righteous eyewitnesses, or innocent by-standers, or those ‘helping us with our enquiries’: hard evidence or pure fiction; truth or illusion? Become messengers: though sadly not in Ford Mercurys.

On homeward journeys in the taxis, they also recorded each other for later viewing: responding to questions such as “Describe the last time you were frightened”.

As the city scrolled past ...

Back in the studio, we projected the four performers' videos simultaneously four times, each time highlighting the soundtrack from one. We witnessed them shouting at strangers, collapsed in the street, playing darts in a club, intruding. It became apparent that these figures were linked in the same story, a work of fiction played out in the real city, standing adjacent to the everyday. And that they were in search of each other! We now understood that they were telephoning each other; holding up photographs of each other; leaving message for ... The city "out there, just now", present in a theatre turned porous.

And in times of tape rewind, we played the personal stories from the taxis on four separate monitors: our travelers part of the polyphony of the city.

All this was lost on those who initially stayed in the studio, who talked with me for thirty minutes of their memories of Cardiff. They had already departed in pursuit of the performers, who had moved to other locations in continuance of their search: to the kebab shop downstairs from 7 James Street. Often to places marginal, sites unencumbered by history, where claim and counter claim might be made, where anything might be said or done, where old scores might be settled. In the main, those non-places and edge-lands of motoring: multi-storey car park, taxi office, petrol station forecourt ...



Getting around: moments of meeting punctuating longer durées of passage. The dramaturgy become both 'tight in time', and 'loose in effects': infused with passing scenes and transient happenings, both intended and otherwise.

The same process was then repeated, a constant coming and going of spectators, and the gradual assembling of fragments: different perspectives on a quest, a love story — maps, scripts, photographs, videos, texts — laid out on five gridded benches in the studio, the only site where the story became available in toto.



We called it Polis: “a multisite performance work, for one room and other places”. Provisionally built from scraps, moments of revelation, morsels of opinion, from the contributions of those present. Its narrative only revealed through quasi-archaeological acts of assemblage, and through interpretive — forensic — work on the part of the spectators. Based on Odysseus’s return to Ithaca.

MS

When the return, in Greek nostos, is precisely the basis for nostalgia — that emotional state accompanying displacement.

MP

The studio here resembled Bruno Latour’s oligopticon: “Seeing a little, very well, but just a little”. Oligoptica, he suggests, do “exactly the opposite of panoptica: they see much too little to feed the megalomania of the inspector or the paranoia of the inspected, but what they see, they see it well”; “From oligoptica, sturdy but extremely narrow views of the connected whole are made possible — as long as connections hold.”

Ensuring those connections is the dramaturgical imperative here: schedules-to-be-met as important as places-to-be. Getting there on time. As Paul Auster writes in *Mao II*: “The city is a device for measuring time.” Performance become itinerant, peripatetic: pausing and moving on, without a trace. Glimpses of the city — of its architectures and fabrics; of its energies, rhythms and populace — leaking into performance. Its ambiances in partial view: as if from a moving vehicle ...

MS

Such an itinerary is what in rhetoric is termed parataxis, the trope of “this and this and this and this ...”, when there just might be no significance at all in the succession of places, when the assembly of people and places past typically contains no narrative, other than that of journey.



Our car design teams today are very interested in the psychology of driving, of how we get on with cars, with the controls, with others in the car, other vehicles on the road, with the car’s place in our daily lives.

They investigate information exchange, emotional responses to different situations, situational awareness — how we perceive what is going on around us. These have become crucial questions, more than ever, as we move into the world of the autonomous vehicle, intelligent cars that need less and less input from a person, even to the point of offering us only passenger seats, as the experience of driving is changing, as the car comes to drive us as much as the other way round.

What then of this flickering experience of passing scenes and transient happenings, both intended and otherwise? Nomadic experience. The juxtaposition and layering of components that come at us.

Is there ever a story in this parataxis — except when framed? In this trope of parataxis. Except when mediated, except as we interact with instrumentality - the dashboard of dials and controls, operations and feedbacks that orient us in our cyborg assemblage with power train, suspension, wheels, roads, streets, signs and others who move across our field of view, across our path. The vehicle a partner in our explorations of the world.



In the Revs Program at Stanford we're considering what it would take to build a museum of the automobile. The key questions don't really concern the cars themselves — which ones to preserve and how (1931 Alfa, 1960s GT40, 1980s Dodge Caravan). The key question concerns the notion of the archive, of memory, of artifact, place, experience. The museum and archive are all about ontology, here the ontology of the car — just what is a car that we might take it forward into the future, conserved, cared for, with as much of what it was and is remaining activated, active?

Are we not required to treat the car as an assemblage, of passings-by as much as metal parts, of conversations held within as much as styles and trims, of the political economy of the twentieth century as much as engine capacity and performance. How do we offer some coherence to this nomadic experience? The archive will need to cope with such forensic portfolios.

Five. Looking out



MS

It's 2002. And this time it's performers who are conveyed.

He is being driven: whence and whither seem unimportant.

He looks out from the back of the limo: detached, disdainful.

For him, playwright Ed Thomas writes:

Do they know he's dined with the best?

At the best locations?

The Angel, The Continental, Le Monde, The Royal and The Dragon?

He sees them tumbling out of Burger King and MacDonal'd's and Miss Millies and Perfect Pizza.

It makes him angry.

They ignore him.

He wants to roll down the window and stick out his head, feel the wind in his hair and shout "Do you know me? Do you know who I am? Do you hear me howl? Do you hear me revolt?"

Through the rear window he plans his last supper.

The cutlery will be silver.

The cotton stiff and white.

The waiters will be smart.

The aperitif chilled.

He will order lamb chops.

A whole rack, and gnaw at the bones.

In this way they will remember him.



There were ten of them in Rain Dogs: “a performance work for the city of Cardiff”. But they never appeared live in performance; they were present only in sequences of video, recorded for precise durations. They were asked to survive — frequently in the public domain — often never quite sure when and from where they were being observed. We saw them standing in the street, caught on CCTV, their stillness deflecting attention towards fellow inhabitants and architecture. Or traveling through the city — by car, train, bus, boat — reliant upon the systems of the city ...

The presence of a group of damaged men — both haunted and haunting — and played by uncertain actors served to present recognizable places in unfamiliar ways, from unexpected perspectives, and to reveal unfamiliar places, rarely visited but adjacent ...



These various short segments totaling seventy-five minutes were projected in parallel with other prospects of the city — this night-time tracking shot from a car — and accompanied by a soundtrack of timed phases.

Only Ed Thomas and I appeared “live”, informally reading over our texts, in reference to, on behalf of the figures on video. The arrangement of the studio theatre — asymmetrical in the seating of audience and the distribution of monitors, projections, sound sources and live narrators — offered varying, though incomplete, views; conspiring in its disorientating layerings and juxtapositions simultaneously to evoke our city, and to render it uncanny. Imbrications of places and of motility ...

He looked out on scenes of drunkenness and mayhem.

“When last orders are called in Cardiff, the party is just beginning. Out on the street the full pantomime is both engaging and revealing” writes photographer Martin Parr. People dress up, and pose draped: making an impression; performing feats; already on screen. Falling, brawling, groping. The domestic become public: lounging, eating, chatting, sprawling. Sometimes stilled: leaning, slumped, passed out, asleep. Sometimes caught in compositions with various moods, focuses and rhythms in a single image. Unbound relationships with others and with surfaces: “a

certain collective doggedness in this wild pursuit of pleasure and abandonment, a doggedness that suggests much deeper discontent”.



Witnessed en passant from the taxi: on screen and – with doors automatically locked – screened off.

MS



Surveillance has become quite comfortable to many. We may feel secure in our locked interiors. Sitting comfortably as we chatter through our machines that are everywhere monitored. The car, on the move, “screened off”, may make us feel more secure, in a third space, neither public nor private. And the upholstery is better than ever! Perhaps it can compensate? Designed ergonomically, with these human factors in mind?

New designs for police cars pay particular attention to the seating, that the computer screens are ready at hand, that the instruments on the utility belt don't dig into the officer's back.

Bill's Chevy doesn't have a back seat at all. There's a big sub-woofer set into the bodywork to blast out low frequencies. Except Bill cannot bring himself to spoil the look of the dashboard with a sound system.

The new Tesla Model S looks and feels exceptionally plush. Something between a Jaguar, BMW 7 series, Audi A8. Dampened sound interior. Thick leather upholstery. And enough computer screen real-estate to match the six figure price tag. All this and it still offers the good green feeling of running an electric motor rather than combustion engine - not even hybrid.

But there are rumors that the interfaces, the smooth response of the electric motor, the quietness, bring on nausea in what might be a new kind of motion sickness. New because it seems to be to do with the changed feedbacks received from the car, not what we are used to with the combustion engine. Feedback is attenuated. The driver displaced, dislocated, disconnected from the machine in a different mobility environment?

Six. Locked in

MP



It's 2005, and we were in the back of a Cardiff Hackney Carriage.

On the rear facing, drop-down seats were two video camera operators, recording us from diagonally opposite. On the floor of the taxi was a stage manager with a stopwatch, who repeatedly called out the instructions for our sequence of movement.

For half an hour, we traveled through the city, engaging in a non-stop, improvised physical duet that consisted of thirty distinct sections, each lasting exactly one minute: we embraced, kissed cheeks, looked past, turned away, pulled, pushed, copied, mirrored, modeled ...

And this we did — from time to time — over more or less time, with more or less energy, with tension, repetitively, fractionally ...

Later, in Chicago, in Be Music, Night the recorded videos were projected simultaneously: different perspectives on the same encounter, as we entered each other's frame. Against the live recital of ten poems by Kenneth Patchen, and live soundtrack for ten free jazz musicians by Peter Brötzmann's Chicago Tentet.

The videos serving as enactment, illustration, counterpoint, contradiction, ambiguous commentary on Patchen's words ...



In performance, I read:

You, the woman; I, the man; this, the world:

And each is the work of all.

There is the muffled step in the snow; the stranger;

The crippled wren; the nun; the dancer; the Jesus-wing

Over the walkers in the village; and there are

Many beautiful arms about us and the things we know.

See how those stars tramp over heaven on their sticks

Of ancient light: with what simplicity that blue

Takes eternity into the quiet cave of God, where Caesar

And Socrates, like primitive paintings on a wall,

Look, with idiot eyes, on the world where we two are.

You the sought for; I, the seeker; this, the search:
And each is the mission of all.
Be music, night,
That her sleep may go
Where angels have their pale tall choirs.

Gradually through our efforts and exertions, the windows began to steam: the passing city become a blur of multicolored illumination; the taxi become a “passion wagon” ...

Recalling trysts in cars, in deserted places: vehicular privacy ...

Close encounters that have now become now a spectator sport — anonymous noses pressed against the windows: parked pornography ...

And with all the motion, in all directions, in our mobile choreography, without straphangers, we began to feel sick — carsick. Evoking queasy memories of the 1950s: that combination of oil and leather and pot-holed winding country roads and rudimentary suspensions.



MS

Windows and sound proofing create the sense of interior, set against the outside. The body work is like skin, integument. Airbags maintain the separation of inside and out. Locks and seat belts attach us to the car. And the carriage, the seating compartment, the coachwork has long ceased to be separate from the chassis — car bodies are unified assemblages, monocoque, working together to deliver protection and performance.

We are with-the-vehicle and locked in. Inside, not outside.

Let me take us back a while to a different automotive world when driving was nothing like this.



Here is Tazio Nuvolari, one of the most iconic of race drivers. The “Flying Mantuan”.

There are no seat belts. The helmet is cursory (Nuvolari always slept with a hairnet to protect his coiffure!) The driver is in the open. No inside-outside, but rather attachment. And when things go wrong you do everything to get free of the car — detachment — you don’t want to be caught with hundreds of pounds of flying metal.

Seven. The sublime



One particular photo of Nuvolari haunts me. Here he is having just won the 1927 Prix Royal in Rome. He is exhausted, out of fuel. His mechanic lifts him out of the car, like any other part.

This is intimate human-machine interaction in the mode of Frankenstein's creature, long before designers realized they could build better things by watching what users actually did, researching

people's lives, before they realized that designing an artifact is always actually about designing an experience.

Race cars in the 20s and 30s ran on noxious fuel mixtures that included benzene and acetone. (I have heard people describe the smell of less noxious substitutes used in running the car today as like pistachio ice cream.) Nuvolari had breathed in so much of the fumes that by the 40s his lungs were permanently damaged and a race would have him coughing blood.



Here's the mask he had designed to help him continue racing.

His nausea was not one of motion sickness, or of changed experience (like the Tesla?), but of relationship, attachment to the vehicle, to breathing its atmosphere, life-giving to the car, poisonous to the driver component. Nuvolari had to accept modification, like any other machine part.

And he was known especially for this complete attachment, evident here in being lifted from the vehicle as well as in his will-to-win, pushing driver and car to their limit.

He gave everything to the car and to the road.

He once won a motorcycle race with his two broken legs tied to the motorcycle; his mechanics had to catch him when he finished. In the 1930 Mille Miglia he tore through the Italian countryside at

150 km/h at night without his headlights on just to catch his arch-rival Achille Varzi; he was unaware that he was already winning the race, according to his times between stages.

There's a famous story about the 1948 Mille Miglia. Nuvolari was driving the new 2 liter Ferrari 166S, but it was not surviving the rigors of the road — parts of the bodywork were falling off, and then his seat broke from its moorings. Nuvolari stopped the car and grabbed a box of lemons from a roadside seller to substitute for the seat, thrown into a ditch. Only when his brakes and the rear suspension failed, the car little more than chassis and engine, did he allow passersby to drag him off his box of lemons.

Nuvolari holding the car together, then failing, even though he had recruited the landscape of Italy. Going to the extreme, all out, going to the edge and looking over. This is the experience of the sublime.

MP



In the 1950s and 60s, my father would take us on Sunday afternoon drives: motoring for leisure. Looking at the land.

In 2006, with my car as mobile gazebo — architectural construct of contemplation — we too sit looking out on this: the windscreen condensing and concentrating the vista as in a Claude glass. We regard the land — as the English so frequently seem to do — from a parked vehicle: stereotypically, a mute couple, gazing at the sea. Drive-in landscape.

At the end of a day here – of meetings with geographers and archaeologists that resemble old-style field trips – I record them, as they contemplate and reflect from this temporary vantage, from their various disciplinary perspectives.

For me, it is something other: it is a window into the past, a flickering screen on which history – personal, familial, local – is conjured in my mind’s eye.

MS

From the 1930s in the UK the Shell Guides brought together a distinctively English taste for landscape and a growing tourist trade of weekend motorists. The series was the brainchild of John Betjeman, neo-Romantic ideologist of Englishness, later the Poet Laureate, and Jack Beddington, the publicity manager of Shell-Mex Ltd, who was keen to promote the Shell brand rather than individual products. Short well-illustrated field guides, in the words of Betjeman, they “had at once to be critical and selective. They had to illustrate places other than the well known beauty spots and to mention the disregarded and fast disappearing Georgian landscape of England; churches with box pews ... provincial streets of the late Georgian era; impressive mills in industrial towns ... These things, for various reasons left out by other guides, are featured in the Shell Guides.”

And by 1938 Betjeman had recruited the wonderful artists Paul Nash and John Piper in conveying spirits of place in their guides to Dorset and Oxfordshire that sat alongside his own to Devon.

Though Thomas Sharp’s guide to my own counties of Northumberland and Durham has a full-bleed picture of a puffin on the front cover. This sea bird, not without cuteness of character, can hardly be said to be anything but a sentimental and oblique symbol of the borderlands of the north east, with their history of internecine conflict and raw industrial power.



MP

It's difficult to believe, but people lived here in the carrlands — not c, a, r but c, a, r, r, from the Danish kjarr, former boglands down along the river — until fairly recently. Pearsons certainly — in the 1930s, 40s and 50s — before land drainage began in earnest. My grandfather's brother Albert Edward and his family: in a farm right on the bank. So close that in the snowmelt of 1947 he had to push threatening icebergs away from the windows with a pole.

It was remote: few chance visitors here; few traveling salesmen, those turbaned Sikh carpet-traders in elderly saloons; few on motoring holidays seeking scenic views.

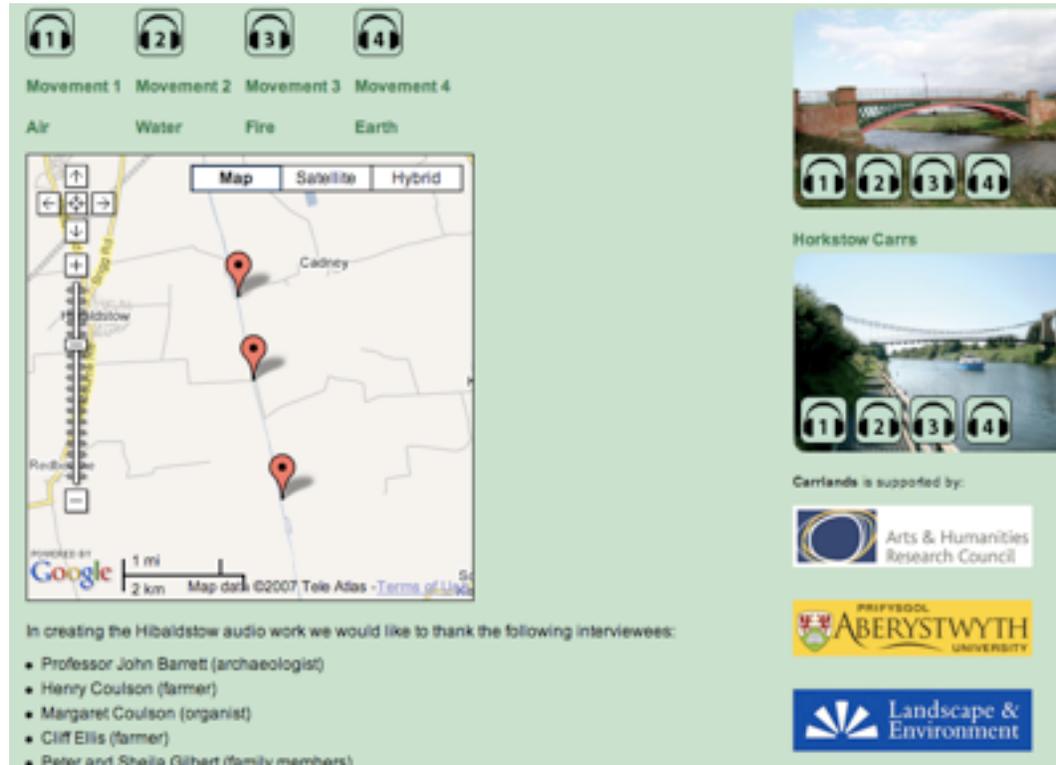
Lorries didn't get down very often, only in summer to collect the corn — and later the potatoes — though if it started to rain it was a job ...

And it was always tricky to get heavy threshing machines here.

But he had one of the first Fordson tractors in the area: no rubber tires, just cleated rims that had to have iron hoops put on to travel on the road.

How to share my enthusiasm for an agricultural landscape — simple, flat, often deserted — that does not easily reveal itself? Without moments of conventional scenic heritage: that lacks those monumental features that draw and orientate our gaze at more exalted sites. Where the land seems draw back from the viewer; where few Xs mark the spot: no blue plaque where Great Uncle Fred would jump from the river bridge despite the metal caliper on his paralyzed leg.

Perhaps through remote performance: Carrlands is a series of three web-based sound compositions inspired by, and set at, locations in this valley. Each sixty minute audio work — a combination of spoken text, music and effects, with subtle invitations to action and instructions to users — offers directions and recommended walks in a landscape infrequently visited, but that has its own subtle qualities and attractions. Though with repeated admonitions to “Imagine this” or “Picture this”, it might equally be listened to in bed. Or from a parked car on the stereo, looking out.



So imagine this. Imagine this as a landscape of darkness, primeval, diluvian ...

Before the dykes were made ... and the river bed changed ... when the carrs were nobbut bog-lands, an' full o' watter-holes ... when this was a land of great meres of black water ... and creeping trickles of green water ... of squishy mools as'd suck owt in ... a wild desolate dreary marsh ... full of strange sights and sounds ... a land teeming with bogles and boggarts and Will-o'-the Wykes and Jack a' Lanterns and such like ... uncanny dwellers ... crawling horrors ... slithery things ... shapeless worms ... the green coated strangers ... hands without arms, rotting flesh dropping from their mouldy bones ... and the voices of dead people ... that came in the darklins ... moaning and crying and beckoning ... all night thruff ... tod-lowries dancing on the tussocks ... wall-eyed woe-women ... and witches riding on the great black snags ... the trunks of bog oaks ... twisted and bent ... that still protruded in the undrained landscape ... that turned to snakes ... and raced with them in the water ... as they wailed round isolated houses ... and rattled the latches ... My word, twor a stra-ange an' ill place to be in, come evens ...

And perhaps as you listen: quietly press central locking, and keep an eye on the rear-view mirror...

MS



In the late eighteenth century and with an aesthetic sensibility you might use a Claude glass to look at the countryside and bring about a transformation into landscape, that genre of making-place-through-picture-making that has one of its roots in the flatlands of seventeenth-century Holland.

Claude glass — a convex tinted mirror that you hold up opposite a vista, through which you view said scene taking a wide-angle view with peripheries and the edges curved inwards in a neat frame, a warm tinted view in all reminiscent of the great seventeenth-eighteenth-century painter of classical Italian landscapes, Claude Lorraine.

Such instruments, like the screen, windshield, rear-view mirror, forge our experience of things.

Their inscription, the engraving of a landscape for example, the photograph of a view (or of a puffin?), allows the transportation of experience, its mobility, even if we simply browse tourist books in the comfort of our home, thrilled perhaps, by remote experience. Instruments can take us to the edge. In the picturesque sublime we look over the cliff at the chasm running through a land that may well be hostile. In the flatlands the overwhelming presence of the sky that has no topographic relief offers a sublime sense of human insignificance.

Maps can offer wayfinding, choices of where to go, or marking out the land that it might be controlled and organized, into parcels to sell and farm, into military expeditions.

And cars are part of this — offering physical mobility too. Because mobility is a state of mind as much as personal physical displacement. This is something very evident in our contemporary world of mobile (media) devices — both car and iPhone are of the same order of contemporary personal mobility, including communication across distance, reach and speed, displacement and movement, encompassing viewing, walking, shifting, transporting. And all through assemblages of glass, metal, machinery, electrical circuits.

Eight. Probing

MP



August 2010. Suddenly the sound of a blaring car horn and a heavy, black sedan powered straight into the midst of the crowd, and came to rest.

I was driving a car from my childhood: a 1958 Rover 90 with prehensile gear stick; ratchet handbrake; wing mirrors; that leaks oil; that we had to coax into life each evening with full use of the choke. We had come the long route in the deserted village, through which the audience had already walked — for the sheer pleasure of it.

Three men in cheap suits emerged: kissing the ground, waving, shaking hands, embracing spectators: like the arrival of Radovan Karadzic at some secret meeting in Pale, Kosovo. And all the while, martial music played from tinny loudspeakers on the roof of a Peugeot van of similar vintage parked nearby.

This was National Theatre Wales's staging of Aeschylus's *The Persians*.

And this was Cilienni — or in its army designation FIBUA (Fighting In Built Up Areas) — a replica village built around 1990 on the Sennybridge Training Area (SENTA), close to the Brecon Beacons National Park in South Wales. SENTA is the British Army's third largest live-firing estate, covering 24,000 hectares of upland terrain: under normal circumstances, public access is strictly prohibited.



There were the Chorus — Darius’s men — quote “understudies to power, rulers by proxy for the warring Xerxes” — as much nightclub bouncers or secret service agents as junta: intimidating and menacing, their forceful entry and proximate energy already too large to imagine confined in the auditorium. There were media men too — knowing how to create an image for the newsgathering, outside broadcast camera that immediately focused on them, as preening and pompous as Mussolini.

FIBUA is a place of simulation: where urban warfare is rehearsed; scenarios tested; and choreographies of corporeal engagement inculcated. It is a cluster of houses with steel shuttered windows: where darkened rooms have trapdoors and creeps; where there is no plumbing; where the barn bears no trace of agricultural labor; where gravestones have neither names nor dedications.

It is a place of performance or at least of rehearsal for performance: occupied sporadically by different casts whose temporary presence and passing to theatres of war elsewhere lingers.

It is already in theatrical mode, providing the daily setting for war games. Any temptation to theatricalize it further — by scenically “dressing” it — would serve as a form of negation. Though mute, it speaks for itself, and in complex and shifting ways.



What is this place an audience might ask? A community without men: with women and children closeted safely out of sight of visitors? A country stripped and bankrupted by war effort? A dismal “victory museum”, displaying the captured detritus of past wars — as in North Korea? An abandoned community in a military “no-go” zone? A deserted film set? War-ravaged Athens?

Whatever: as a restricted military site, FIBUA is beyond the purview of those regulatory authorities that license public events in the UK. Anything might indeed happen here: the mass movement of audiences, the inclusion of vehicles ...

Smokey autos: grinding gears, blowing exhausts ...

And when the Queen arrived, it was in a matching white 1958 Rover 90.



MS

Mobility and displacement – a village in Germany brought to a military range in west Wales.

And here in the performance the car acts as cultural probe. They arrived and posed questions that prompted response. “What’s this car up to?” Poke something, introduce something, intervene, interrupt and see what happens — this is probing.

There’s a rhetorical aspect to this, of course — setting up questions, setting up juxtapositions that puzzle, so as to elicit response. “Let me try another line of questioning, one you may not have thought of ...”

It’s a tactic of the assembly and law court.

Probing witnesses.

MP

But this was not a period production: why the slight anachronism of the old Rovers?

What do these cars represent?

Perhaps this is an aristocracy that retains its vehicles as a show of national, industrial heritage; or because, in their irregular ceremonial role, their mileage is still low ...

Perhaps because these are the only vehicles left running in a threadbare nation ...

Perhaps as a dramatic conceit: a subtle mnemonic for the height of the Cold War ...

Perhaps, in the end, because we just wanted the opportunity to drive “classic” cars, as free of regulations as the site itself: with four gears, bench seats, no seat belts.

To experience the ergonomics of past motoring — posture; manual engagement; wrestling with steering and propulsion and braking ... With all that is now “assisted” or removed entirely from the driver’s concern: forfeited to the automobile itself ...Auto-mobile, the autonomous vehicle.

Desire as well as necessity an equal driver in our compositional approaches to performance.

What they offer is the look and feel of heavy vehicles on the road, a glimpse of the past pitching into the present; rolling heritage; them here, in our present, functioning.

And this before the oil runs out and they become museum exhibits, or chicken hutches, or less-than-mobile homes ...

Incidentally, we bought them both, and we sold them both, on eBay.



MS

What makes a classic car, a collectable to be bought and sold on eBay?

The Classic Car Club of America is quite clear: a classic car is “a “Fine” or “Distinctive” automobile, American or foreign built, produced between 1925 and 1948. Generally, a classic was high-priced when new and was built in limited quantities. Other factors, including engine displacement, custom coachwork and luxury accessories, such as power brakes, power clutch, and “one-shot” or automatic lubrication systems, help determine whether a car is considered to be a classic.”

More generally a Classic may be considered to be exemplary, a paradigm of some automotive quality perhaps, iconic.

Bill’s Chevy is iconic, built with a classic in this sense, perhaps not a classic in itself, but certainly attests to conscious design decisions — this body, this surface, this engine, these modifications.

Consider that often design is in this way a statement - “this is good, isn’t it”, an argument for something like “the good life” - “buy this, use this, and things will be better”.

We have talked about forensics of experience — working with evidence, sources, witness statements, traces and remains to piece together an account of what is happening or has happened, like detectives, seeking key facts that will enable us to distinguish the more from the less significant.

Cars partake of a forensic dramaturgy. Consider the features of a car that makes a claim to significance:

the car as witness — the car was there!

the car as perpetrator, as agent — the car did it!

the car comes clean and speaks for itself — it is genuine and authentic;

the car has a lot to say — a key witness that perhaps helps unravel a complex story (in contrast to others that may have little to say or offer);

the car is a character witness — trust what this car, and those associated with it, has to say;

the car is worth listening to if it has credentials, a pedigree, a genealogy, and you know where it comes from, its background.

We may resort to figures of speech in this forensic rhetoric of significance:

synecdoche, when part stands for whole — a Porsche 917 standing for motor sports;

metonymy — a car closely associated with something such that it comes to stand for it — the Mercedes-Benz 770, Hitler’s car standing for the Third Reich; a Rover for dignified state;

metaphor and allegory — a car standing for a story - “this is adventure”; here the car may indeed be iconic — standing for much more than itself.

Then there’s the way the case is presented. A car may make an emotional appeal — “this is so beautiful it must be important”.

The case may be made to appear to be about much more than it seems from first impressions — “there’s a lot more at stake here – this is not just any Rover”.

History is all about advocacy — in the law court and the assembly of those who can speak, listen and act.

And the spaces where this can happen, spaces of connection and association, of converging and diverging mobility, places of assembly.

Nine. Res publica

MP



August 2012: in a disused, second world-war aircraft hangar at Royal Air Force base St Athan, close to Cardiff Airport. And this was the production of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* by National Theatre Wales in association with the Royal Shakespeare Company.

In the immense, barrel-vaulted concrete structure, ninety metres long and fifty metres wide, the designers built two, two-meter high breeze-block walls across the space, with a two and a half meter gap between them, thus creating three regions: Rome; central war zone; and the territory of the enemy Volsces — the world of the early Republic.

They also installed three stripped-out trailers: as interior locations for Coriolanus's family; for the Roman patricians; and for enemy leader Aufidius.

Enough space for staging different scenes in different locations, provisionally occupied.

Unobstructed, it allowed the replication of performative phenomena of the city and its body politic: victory parades, ceremonial entries, street demonstrations and riots. And traffic.

For the production also included three moving vehicles from the late 1990s, and several wrecks.

The Citizens arrive in a silver Leyland van, Coriolanus in a Volvo estate, and Aufidius in an Audi: all slightly retro.



Inserting kinesis into the dramaturgy: momentum; traction; drive.



Shakespeare's world is crowded, and there are few empty spaces in it: in twenty-five of twenty-nine scenes, crowds are present. Of the multiple locations, many are nowhere in particular — camps, battlefields; streets, marketplaces: there are only two or three distinct interiors — Coriolanus's house, Aufidius's house. There is a nascent public sphere: with argument and dissent in plain view. Characters emerge for a moment from the crowd and are lost in it again. Continuous comings and goings, on foot, by vehicle: entrances, meetings, reunions and departures that foster the fluid, unstable situation.



This and the play's open and direct setting — lack of sub-plots, very few indoor scenes yet ever-present crowds — make it a resonant counterpoint to current political events — with their unreliable leaderships, ad-hoc factions and coalitions, fleeting allegiances and shifting loyalties, civic uncertainties and disturbances, military adventurism and fledgling democracies — and attendant round-the-clock news and social media.

All action was videoed and projected simultaneously onto two large screens. Seven cameras were employed: with two news-gathering teams following the action at ground level; permanent systems rigged in caravans; and two overhead, radio-controlled devices tracking events. Reflecting a conjoined world of celebrity and surveillance; of constant media attention and intrusion; of embedded transmission; of improvised recording and uploading; of covert monitoring.

Private scenes “behind closed doors” in inaccessible interiors, in the trailers and in vehicles — were witnessed on CCTV, and through windows. And throughout in an audio broadcast that remained constant however far the listener from the action. For all actors were radio-miked, and all spectators wore headsets through which they heard the voices mixed live with a continuous musical soundtrack. With no need to project towards any particular audience, actors could use different tones of voice and engage directly in intimate conversation with their colleagues: all text — whispered thoughts, asides, commentaries — registered true however removed the action, or partial the view.



The audience resembled an urban, plebian crowd — the assembly. And without ever being choreographed, they behaved as they might in a street performance, as scenes emerged from and were lost in their midst: negotiating their own presence; deciding where to position themselves; adopting circular arrangements around events; moving to see better; being distracted by parallel happenings; avoiding traffic, and other people.

Following the action; watching the films.



A city, and a dramaturgy, in motion, in flux: settings created in an impromptu manner — a circle of chairs became the senate. With scenes on and in vehicles: the roof of the van as a platform for oration, its illuminated rear — with doors open — the place of the interrogation of Coriolanus. Aufidius watched the pleading of Coriolanus's mother Volumnia, for Rome from a front seat through a windscreen; her success was marked not by a triumphal re-entry into Rome, but a hurried exit in the Volvo into a dark night, knowing she had ensured Coriolanus's demise.



Vehicles as temporary scenographic settings, locations, enclosures: at rest, and in motion. Camera focus zooming in, into interiors; and pulling out for corteges ...

Allusions to the shifting identity of the automobile in contexts of contemporary conflict: as symbol of newfound status; as temporary refuge; as weapon; as detritus ...



The car as material object,



... as motive potential



MS

... the car as industry



... as road and itinerary



... as copresence



... as voice and music



... as open door



... as enlightenment



... the car as atmosphere

When you put your foot down Bill's Chevy fills with gasoline fumes. It's down to those carburetors, the amount of fuel going into the 409 cubic inches of eight engine cylinders.

I have long been suspicious of the concept of *zeitgeist* — spirit of the age — too Hegel, too idealist, not grounded in the complexities and contradictions of material experience. But atmosphere, as spirit of the times, is a suitable designation for the car and everything that comes with it, as medium breathed, ambient, both nourishing and potentially poisonous.

In this the car is indeed *res publica* — the public thing, shared principles of agency and experience, of political economy as well as the assembly in which the cultural imaginary is lived out.

The car as body politic.

Acknowledgements

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Mike thanks Mike Brookes for his help on many of the productions.

The Persians was a 2010 National Theatre Wales site specific production on the Sennybridge Military Training Ranges, Wales. Directed by Mike Pearson, conceptual design Mike Brookes, scenic design by Simon Banham. Photography was by Paul Farrow Creative/National Theatre Wales.

Coriolan/us was a 2012 National Theatre Wales/Royal Shakespeare Company site specific production at RAF St Athan, Wales. Directed by Mike Pearson and Mike Brookes, with scenic design by Simon Banham and musical score by John Hardy. Photography was by Mark Douet.

The photographs of the Vauxhalls and the Mercedes 300 were found in Google searches, with unattributable photographers.

The photographs of Nuvolari are from Count Giovanni Lurani's biography *Nuvolari: Legendary Champion of International Auto Racing*, Sports Car Press, New York, 1959.

The CCTV still image on page 34 is courtesy of South Wales Police.