

Curtin University

Kath Dooley

Night bus: a short drama script

Abstract:

Night bus is a creative exploration of relationship between the screenplay, affect and bodies. The short film script sees a re-imagining of contemporary, real life events to produce a dramatic narrative concerned with themes of public violence, individual intervention and responsibility. Following on from research into the affective dimensions of cinema, this has been written as a means to explore the conditions that encourage the production of bodily sensation at a conscious and unconscious level within the screenplay itself. I have sought an answer to the question of how the screenwriter's description of material gives rise to a visceral response in the reader, which may also be reflected in a resulting film text. My screenwriting focuses on the creative use of narrative content and the description of aesthetic dimensions such as colour, light, sound, movement, rhythm and texture to affect the reader.

Biographical note:

Dr Kath Dooley is a filmmaker and academic in the Department of Film, Television and Screen Arts at Curtin University, Western Australia. She recently completed a creative PhD exploring portrayals of the body in the work of contemporary French directors Claire Denis, Catherine Breillat and Marina de Van at Flinders University, South Australia. Kath has written a number of short and feature length screenplays, and has also directed several award winning short films and music videos. Her current research interests include film production methodology and screenwriting in Australia and France.

Keywords:

Creative Writing – Screenwriting – Short drama – Affect

Night bus: a short drama script

The Characters

KELLY – An intelligent, well-educated, young professional.

TOM – Kelly's boyfriend.

CHANTAL – An aggressive and attention-seeking teenager.

KRYSTAL – Chantal's impulsive and irresponsible accomplice.

BUS DRIVER

VARIOUS PASSENGERS

Setting

Adelaide, South Australia, present day.

NIGHT BUS

FADE IN:

1. EXT. CITY STREET - EVENING

Tall buildings cast thick, dark shadows onto wet pavement. Slow moving traffic and random pedestrians in casual evening dress move by as KELLY (28) and TOM (30), a casually dressed couple, stroll side by side. Overhanging roadside trees rustle in the wind. Kelly stuffs cold hands into her jean pockets.

KELLY

I'm not saying it was a bad film. I just think that the characters were a bit weak. I feel like, on some level, they had it coming.

TOM

To meet a grisly death at the hands of a serial killer?

KELLY

C'mon, Tom. They could have fought back a bit.

TOM

(laughs)

That's a bit harsh.

They arrive at a bus stop. TWO OTHER COMMUTERS stand waiting nearby, their eyes on mobile phone devices.

Kelly stares at the bright red tail lights of passing cars.

TOM

I thought it was good. Plenty of action, good story...

KELLY

Plenty of hot chicks...

Tom smiles and playfully hugs Kelly.

A bus arrives at the bus stop, hissing as it pulls to a halt.

ROLL TITLE: 'NIGHT BUS'

CUT TO:

2. INT. BUS - NIGHT

We hear a steady thump-thump as the bus powers forward over uneven asphalt. The moving bus harbours a handful of dreary and silent passengers, whose reflections stare back at them in dark windows. Fluorescent lights buzz overhead and a generic commercial radio pop track plays from hidden speakers. Flashes of light stream past from outside as the bus hums along.

AN ELDERLY MAN with a walking stick sits quietly, reading, at the front of the bus.

A WOMAN in her fifties sits with eyes closed in a seat behind him. She rubs her face, tired.

TWO MEN in their forties sit and chat quietly further back.

Two lone LATE TEENS have their attention on mobile phone devices in the middle section of the bus.

Kelly sits aside the aisle, next to Tom (who is at the window), towards the rear of the bus.

She stares at her tired reflection in a nearby window, and yawns.

Kelly massages the back of her neck with one hand.

She notices a drip of water moving down the wall at Tom's side. The roof has a small leak.

Tom drops his head onto Kelly's shoulder. He is also tired. The thump-thump sound slows in pace.

CUT TO:

3. EXT. BUS - NIGHT

The bus pulls to the side of the road with a screech. The rear orange indicator light blinks on and off so that red neon light reflects on wet bitumen nearby. We hear the sounds of late night city traffic, nearby club beats and the hum of the now stationary bus' steaming motor.

CUT TO:

4. INT. BUS - NIGHT

The front door of the bus is open. CHANTAL (18) and KRYSTAL (17) stumble on board, unsteady, inebriated. They wear short, tight dresses and extremely high platform heels. Chantal staggers forward, with Krystal behind her.

CHANTAL

(mutters)

Give me my ticket.

Krystal is searching for tickets in a handbag.

Kelly watches. Tom stirs. He checks the girls out, interested.

Kelly notices Tom looking and frowns at him. Tom shuts his eyes and returns his head to Kelly's shoulder.

Chantal grabs a ticket from Krystal's hand.

The MALE BUS DRIVER (25) stares at Krystal.

She notices and in response, presses herself against the plastic wall that separates him from his passengers.

KRYSTAL

Take a photo!

The bus driver looks away.

Krystal chuckles to herself.

The front doors snap shut and the bus returns to motion.

Kelly returns her gaze to the side window. The thump-thump noise starts once more.

The drip of water has moved down to the floor nearby, where a small pool of liquid is forming.

Tom moves his head close to the glass and exhales a strong, warm breath. The glass fogs. He uses his finger tip to draw a smiley face, but then he changes the smile to a frown.

Tom looks to Kelly, who mimics the crudely drawn expression on her own face for a moment, then lets it go. Tom smiles back and they both relax into the shaking movement of the bus.

Suddenly there is a loud noise- a bottle hitting the ground.

Kelly and Tom stir and look to the front of the bus.

Krystal has thrown an empty alco-pop bottle in the baggage hold. It rolls around noisily. Chantal is angry.

CHANTAL

I told you to leave me some,
you cow!

Krystal laughs and starts to swing from the bus' overhead bars.

Chantal loses one of her shoes as the bus jerks without warning.

CHANTAL

(yells)
Nice driving!

The anxious eyes of the bus driver can be seen in the rear view mirror. He makes eye contact with Kelly in the mirror for a moment.

Various bus commuters glimpse at the girls, unsettled.

The women in her fifties clutches the metal railing at her side.

Kelly rubs her hand over the coarse fabric of her jeans as she and Tom watch. The thump-thump noise quickens as the bus picks up speed.

Chantal is clumsily trying to slip her shoe back onto her foot.

CHANTAL
(To Krystal)
These shoes suck!

The elderly man lowers his book.

ELDERLY MAN
Keep your voices down.

Chantal and Krystal look at him with disdain.

CHANTAL
What did you say?

ELDERLY MAN
It's rude. Keep your voices down.

Chantal and Krystal exchange a somewhat amused look. Chantal hunches over the man, invading his space.

CHANTAL
What's that old man?

ELDERLY MAN
Try to act like ladies.

Chantal looks at Krystal and scoffs. She leans down and knocks the man's book out of his hands.

The thumping noise speeds up as the bus continues to accelerate. The man reaches for his book but Chantal kicks it further away, towards Krystal, who reaches down unsteadily to pick it up.

Kelly and Tom exchange a concerned glance.

ELDERLY MAN

Give that back!

Krystal laughs, and then throws it at the man. He flinches and gasps as it hits him in the face.

Krystal and Chantal laugh.

Kelly recoils, shocked.

Other commuters glance around the bus, anxious.

The bus driver's scared eyes check the passing events in the rear view mirror, but the bus continues to move forward.

The elderly man rises from his seat. His shaking hand clutches the walking stick. He reaches out for the nearby Chantal, who pushes him aggressively. He falls back into his seat.

Chantal looks about the bus, outraged.

CHANTAL

(to other passengers)

He tried to hit me!

Nearby passengers avoid Chantal's gaze.

Chantal moves forward and slaps the man on his shoulder.

Krystal moves forward and joins in.

KRYSTAL

You can't touch us!

ELDERLY MAN

Get away!

He swipes back at the girls.

Kelly looks around the bus. She turns to Tom.

KELLY

Somebody needs to stop them!

Tom is conflicted.

TOM

They're dangerous. Just leave it.

Chantal and Krystal repeatedly slap the man, cursing and yelling. The man tries to defend himself but fails.

Kelly is appalled. She stands up and makes a move down the aisle. Then Tom pulls her back.

TOM

Don't!

Tom makes a move forward in her place, approaching the wild girls.

His footing is slow but firm as he advances, this movement irregular against the steady thump-thump of the bus.

Other commuters stare as he passes and reaches the front section.

TOM

Leave him alone!

The girls continue with the attack, which is becoming increasingly aggressive.

Tom moves between the man and the girls. We hear the squeal of brakes as the bus slows, and the hissing of the engine. All passengers jerk to one side.

Kelly watches, holding her breath.

Chantal looks at Tom with aggression.

CHANTAL

Get away!

There is a moment of stillness of bodies.

The hissing of the engine grows louder. Then Krystal punches Tom in the face, hard. He gasps and recoils. Blood trickles from his nose.

Chantal pulls Krystal towards her.

CHANTAL

We'll sue you. You can't touch us!

Tom staggers across the aisle, clutching his face.

Kelly jumps to her feet and races forward. The bus lurches to the side of the road.

Other commuters stare as she approaches the girls.

KELLY

(fierce)

Get off the bus!

She puts herself between the girls and the elderly man.

Tom wipes his bleeding nose with the back of his hand.

Krystal smirks at him, amused, with an excited look in her eyes.

Chantal raises her hand to push Kelly away, but Kelly grabs it and twists her arm.

CHANTAL

Ow! You're hurting me!

The front doors open.

KELLY

Get off!

CHANTAL

(hysterical)

Stop it! You're hurting me!

Kelly turns and notices one of the nearby YOUNG PASSENGERS is filming the altercation on his mobile phone.

Kelly releases Chantal's arm and takes a step back.

KELLY
(to the passenger)
Turn that off!

CHANTAL
(crying now)
That's assault!

The driver opens his compartment and takes a step out.

CHANTAL
That's assault you bitch!

Chantal and Krystal retreat towards the front door but then Krystal takes a step forward to kick the driver's plastic barrier.

KELLY
Get off!

CHANTAL (to Krystal)
C'mon.

The girls stagger off into the darkness outside the bus, cursing. We hear the amplified sounds of passing traffic outside.

Kelly moves back. She picks up the elderly man's book and returns it to him.

Tom rests against a seat nearby. Kelly clutches him and examines his bruised, blood-smearred face.

She turns to look at the other bus commuters. Some of them meet her gaze, while others look away.

CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER

Kelly and Tom sit together, more tired, and recovering from the ordeal. The pop background music continues, as do the dull screeches of the moving bus, and the repetitive thump-thump of tyres on asphalt.

The steady trickle of water has now passed underneath their wet feet and into the aisle of the bus.

Suddenly we hear the recorded sound of commotion coming from a nearby mobile device.

Kelly looks about. She recognises the sounds- it is the fight that has just happened. Her own words ring out. The source is a mobile phone belonging to the teenage boy who sits a few seats forward.

Kelly rises and approaches the teenager.

An annoyed Tom looks on.

Kelly looks over the teenager's shoulder to see images of herself and the two wild girls.

KELLY

Delete it.

The teenager pauses.

KELLY

(more aggressive)

Delete it!

The teenager recoils, scared.

TEENAGER

Okay.

He hurriedly deletes the file.

Kelly returns to her seat and dumps herself down next to Tom. The pair exchange a long gaze. Kelly runs her hand down the

side of Tom's injured face. The thump-thump sound accelerates as the bus powers forward.

FADE TO BLACK

END OF SCRIPT

Research statement

Research background

Writers from a variety of backgrounds (Shaviro 1993, Sobchack 2004) have considered how cinema affects the viewer on a bodily level. For MacDougall, films appeal in a 'direct way to the human sensorium, in part because of the senses they address' (2006: 57), while for Marks, films call upon the viewer's traumatic and everyday experience to 'evacuate memories from objects' (200: 77). *Night Bus* draws upon this research to consider the relationship between the individual body of the reader/viewer and the screenplay. The script explores themes of public violence and individual responsibility in a contemporary and familiar setting. Within this I have sought to explore how descriptions of action might arouse corporeal reactions of fear, pleasure and/or disgust in the reader, drawing upon their own experience of public violence.

Research contribution

Night Bus investigates the application of concepts related to the embodied viewing of film texts to the screenplay text. Academic arguments presented by writers cited above have been explored in creative form through the writing of action and dialogue. New knowledge can be found in the script's narrative content and description of aesthetic dimensions such as colour, light, sound, movement, rhythm and texture, which are utilised to trigger certain bodily responses in the reader/viewer.

Research significance

This script questions how the screenplay, as opposed to the completed film, might draw upon the reader's own bodily experience as a means to increase engagement with its themes. I explore how the use of language within the realm of signification and representation can engage the reader on a visceral level. The script is a wholly original creative work that stands as evidence of the creative exploration of scholarly ideas related to cinema and affect.

Works cited

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