



Source: Paul McGeough, 'Insurgents back with vengeance after lull', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 02/03/06.

Tags: [death](#), [travel](#), [workplace](#)

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From the asphalt-covered station platform, Kurt watches a sliver of red light split the horizon, a slowly widening wound in a steel-grey sky that gives no hint of forgiveness. Kurt feels pried apart. He boards the first carriage because it's always heated in winter and air-conditioned in summer. Today is no different. Although he hasn't checked the last carriage, he figured the heating would almost certainly be the case there as well. Kurt supposed this was a luxury for the passengers in these carriages as they were taking the chance of almost certainly being killed in the event of a collision. Staring out the window he thinks it's a crime to be on a train at 5.20 a.m. This early in the morning the carriage is like a tomb, a rolling metal casket, quiet and freezing. A corpse wouldn't deteriorate in here. Nearly everyone in the carriage is asleep. The passengers on the train at this time are labourers, mostly. You can tell by the caps.

Next stop Emu Plains, then Penrith, Blacktown, Parramatta, Granville, Strathfield, Redfern and Sydney Central. The guard's voice sounds full and rounded, each word with a little too much expression, like he's practising for TV voice-over work.

On a train you just tend to zombie out, your mind wanders...and wanders. You have to have intent to do something before the train moves because once the hypnotic ka-chack ka-chack effect takes over, you just stare out the window, lost. That's right, staring at all the same things you've seen before. Every day bookended by this bland, monotonous journey, projecting the image of stability. The same houses, the same green seats, inside and out. Past housing commission and run-down flats, industrial areas, parks and playgrounds, high-tension wires, fields of corpses. Roads, shopping complexes, burnt-out theatres, schools and churches. People wallowing on the platforms. Creeks running into stagnant pools and lakes. The same roads, the back fences of properties, trees, rocks, rubbish, graffiti...

One fence Kurt always notices has been painted brown so many times you can see the thickness of paint. It's simply a young wide-eyed graffitiist's wet dream. An open expanse they love to spray their mark all over. Been tagged easily fifty times and the owner just keeps painting over it. Kurt thought what the owner should do is get a sensor light connected to a sprinkler system to illuminate and drench the offenders whenever they neared the fence, catching them in the act. Kurt also thought this sounded like the sub-plot of a bad comedy-movie or sitcom. This fence isn't far from where two trains collided, killing a dozen people, the wreckage a macabre twisted sculpture. Further down the line, after the bridge, is a caravan park full of caravans that don't go anywhere. The park is next to the river where a murdered baby girl was found. One of the residents gave himself up.

The train whips under a bridge where only a few weeks

before a teenager had leapt straight into the train's path. Kurt was an hour and a half late home that day. Further down the line in the parking area of the next station, where Kurt's car was once broken in to, there's always flowers on the fence in one spot where a baby boy's body was dumped after being raped and murdered. Sure-shot reminders that this train line is one long track of death.

Kurt remembered some graffiti: 'Cops killed Tsakos'. The writer was no artist—a simple statement in plain white paint sprayed on a backyard fence somewhere between Blacktown and Parramatta. Kurt saw it so many times when he was a kid. Every time he went to the city by train he looked for it, but never really thought about what it meant. Though it's not there anymore, covered, painted over, he tries to remember which green metal fence it was on. 'Cops killed Tsakos'. Covered over, maybe, like Tsakos' death. Covered over, maybe, like murder. Kurt wondered what sort of man (assuming Tsakos was a man, it sounded like a man's name to Kurt) was Tsakos? Was he good? Bad? Young? Old? Did he have a family? A wife? Was he a wife-beater? Did he have a job? A future? How did the cops kill him? With a knife? A gun? Did they bludgeon him with their nightsticks until his brains oozed out of his eye sockets and his blood soaked their shirts? Did they laugh, calling him a wog? Was it two cops or more? Were they skinny or fat? Did they work out at the gym, taking steroids so when they hit Tsakos with their fists and steel-capped shoes, his flesh felt like putty? Did they think Tsakos was a sponge that could soak up the pain? Were they on the take and Tsakos was going to blow the whistle on them, they'd get nicked and have to give up their overseas holidays and their wives' facials? Cops killed Tsakos. Was Tsakos his real name?

Cops killed Tsakos. That's all Kurt ever knew. How could it be disputed? The message was there and he believed it. How many people saw that message every day? An advertisement that didn't sell anything. A truth that could hardly be doubted, because it was there, standing out. There was no other graffiti near and was never covered over by other graffiti for years, like a monument, a sacred site.

One thing's for sure though. Tsakos is dead.

The train's relentless rhythm of low hum air-conditioning and ka-chack ka-chack ka-chack...

Kurt's eyelid's droop. Everything sweeps by.

ka-chack ka-chack ka-chack...

The grass close to the train track blurs.

ka-chack ka-chack ka-chack...

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ross Murray.*