COPYRIGHT AND USE OF THIS THESIS

This thesis must be used in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Reproduction of material protected by copyright may be an infringement of copyright and copyright owners may be entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.

Section 51 (2) of the Copyright Act permits an authorized officer of a university library or archives to provide a copy (by communication or otherwise) of an unpublished thesis kept in the library or archives, to a person who satisfies the authorized officer that he or she requires the reproduction for the purposes of research or study.

The Copyright Act grants the creator of a work a number of moral rights, specifically the right of attribution, the right against false attribution and the right of integrity.

You may infringe the author’s moral rights if you:

- fail to acknowledge the author of this thesis if you quote sections from the work
- attribute this thesis to another author
- subject this thesis to derogatory treatment which may prejudice the author’s reputation

For further information contact the University’s Director of Copyright Services

sydney.edu.au/copyright
From 100 Days in Search of the Ramones to Bury the Hatchet

Notes on a participatory practice including projects explored during my candidature.

By Carla Cescon

June 2010
Table of Contents

Forward

- Introduction; The Open Work.

- Chapter 1- a strange brew; oddities within the everyday.

- Chapter 2- Horror and its rock n roll Aesthetic.

- Chapter 3- A Collaboration with other artists and written projects.

- A Conclusion? 34 months of work give or take a week.

List of Projects during candidature

Bibliography
Forward

Drawing ideas from film and music has been the basis of my art practice over the last 9 years. The nature of this work examined through installation describes an intense subjectivity inherent within seemingly banal relationships. Bringing together elements of everyday life through experienced and observed events and mixing it up with a fan-like zest for storytelling.
Introduction; The Open Work

This dissertation is to research how it is that the open work relates to my practice as an artist. Making myself an example and using my contributions to exhibitions and events that have coincided with my candidature as the critical focal point.

I have always looked at visual art in particular installation, as a possible participatory storyboard for life events, film or an extensive book with many chapters and an infinite number of subjects. It’s the same way I approach making my own work. I’ve seen elements of the Chant of Jimmy Black Smith\(^1\) in Joan Grounds\(^2\) Columbus visits the cave of Guadalupe 1995, Last Tango in Paris\(^3\) in John Lethbridge’s\(^4\) untitled no 6, Subway\(^5\) through Alicia Frankovich’s\(^6\) Super Segue 2009 and “Brazil”\(^7\) in drawings by Locust Jones\(^8\).

I am aware of the continuous cross-referencing of fiction and real life. We witness actual life events that artists draw on as a way to make-work. We witness scenes from the media that could lie within the pages of a novel. The ongoing conflict in Iraq for example, transferred to and filtered through the media, echoes the broadcast voice of big brother in the film adaptation of George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four\(^9\). In the film, updates come in

---

\(^1\) Chant of Jimmy Black Smith written by Thomas Keneally (Random House Australia 1972)

\(^2\) Joan Grounds is a visual artist currently living and working in Sydney Australia

\(^3\) Last Tango in Paris, written and directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, (distribution by United Artists 1973)

\(^4\) John Lethbridge is a visual artist living and working in Sydney Australia.

\(^5\) Subway written and directed by Luc Besson (distribution by Gaumont France 1985)

\(^6\) Alicia Frankovich is a visual artist from New Zealand currently working in Berlin, Germany

\(^7\) Brazil written and directed by Terri Gilliam (distributed by Universal Studios 1985)

\(^8\) Locust Jones is an artist living and working in the Blue Mountains.

the form of announcements. These announcements herald victories and failures, as well as, comment on the shifting front line between Oceanian a province of Airstrip One (a world of pervasive government surveillance, public mind control and the voided citizens’ rights) and Eurasia an unknown opposition, possibly even a fictional one. The populous feel all at once responsible, burdened and addicted to listening to the advancements made by a country at war. The media in contemporary western culture to this day treats information on world events much the same way as in Nineteen Eighty-Four, talking heads spouting news flashes with text scrolls. Orwell’s allegorical tale outlines for the potential new world order to creep up and lay claim to our lives feels ever present.

An artistic endeavor is something that freely captures comments made by the artist, through the connection of possibilities while at the same time propositioning a question or questions. Creating artworks that look as though they could appear unfinished and in continuous postproduction meaning, further inquiry may be followed through by those who experience the work. “The art of post production seems to respond to the proliferating chaos of global culture in the information age, which is characterized by an increase in supply of works and the art world’s annexation of forms ignored or disdained until now.”

Postproduction is a term traditionally used within film and television industries that denotes the series of processes that are added after the work is done. Sounds and other finishing touches are included leading on to distribution.

In Umberto Ecco’s *Poetics of the Open Work* he talks about “a work in movement”. He firstly explains this using Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück XI*, a single sheet of music paper with a series of note groupings and simple instructions on how to use the musical notes.

12 ibid.
Reinterpreting it with sequences, timing and lengths of notes to be played according to judgments made by individual performers. Ecco broadens the statement by including other areas of the arts, visual art and literature. “at this point one could object (with reference to the wider meaning of “openness”) any work of art, even if it is not passed on to the addressee in an unfinished state, demands a free, inventive response, if only because it cannot really be appreciated unless the performer somehow reinvents it in psychological collaboration with the author”\(^\text{13}\). Simon Barney’s painting installation at the Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney in 2006 is an example of surrendered authorship and performer all in one. Title of the group show was *Situation*, Barney in the beginning asked colleagues to write a list of instructions for a painting he would then execute and pin up onto the wall, instructions outlined the style and subject requested to be painted. For the duration of the exhibition members of the public could also submit an instruction that would then be realized and pinned to the wall along with the initial instruction. The outcome was interesting as each painting made him use different techniques, emotions and subject matter creating a wall with very different paintings.

Stephane Mallarme’s colossal poetic work “The world exists to end up in a book”\(^\text{14}\) which Ecco sites as reference in *The Open Work*\(^\text{15}\), and a book that was never finished during Mallarme’s lifetime, although sketches for the ending were uncovered in the research carried out by Jacues Scherer\(^\text{16}\) contains an idea that books are without beginning and end.


\(^\text{16}\) Ibid.
They merely cross a point in time and place and carry on from there. Like a throw of the dice deciding the circumstance relating to choice and eliminating the responsibility of decision making, where grammar is introduced and ideas interject between place and event in relation to each other. This made me think of the movie Out of Africa\textsuperscript{17} where the lead female character launches into storytelling only after she is given the first sentence. Ironic since the narrative places the character herself as having arrived at that point by chance after adapting to a throw of the dice-like situation. The people she meets influence her destiny and repercussions endured from world events. It’s probably better that Mallarme didn’t finish the book, and that his own death became one of the elements in its polymorphic direction. Serving to accentuate the idea as open ended.

I started thinking of the endless book and Ecco’s “a work in movement” as the continuation of the work from its deliberately unfinished state to its psychological collaboration between author and the attendee/viewer, and how it can easily shift within the realm of contemporary art’s mammoth and never ending task of locating itself within time and place. How contemporary art is constructed to situate itself within community and culture in which every work is extended through a relationship to another work. Nicolas Bourriaud also cites Mallarme and Ecco with the combined view on “openness” in \textit{Postproduction}. Bouriaud combine’s his view on the processes in contemporary art that involves the idea that artworks are open and participatory in theory and/or experience. Those that use themes of time and place or feature works made by others or use product currently available on the cultural market. He says, “these artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work.”\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Out of Africa} directed by Sydney Pollack (distribution Universal Picture 1985)

Chapter 1- Strange Brew

Locating oddities within the everyday and salvaging some resemblance to rational thought. By talking about observations experienced on a day-to-day basis there is the chance to create a foundation for ideas.

An interview in 2009 between Scott Donovan and myself was supposed to be a conversation about a shared view on the concept of death, or something like that. It was a commissioned article for Runway magazine that became an observational discussion on experiences within our lives that create the energy to want to make art. This conversation was asked that it should link to the work *Shapeshifters and nightcrawlers; 100 days and nights in search of the Ramones*. Instead it made everyday experiences look extraordinary and something taken from the pages of I’m *Ok- You’re Ok* a book that uses transactional analysis, which confronts the individual with the fact that he or she is responsible for what happens in the future.

**Wake up you’re dead!!!**

**SD:** You've said the world is full of people who don't realise they're dead. Are you talking about actual zombies or someone you might encounter at IKEA or an MCA fundraiser? How can you tell the difference?

**CC:** It all started five years ago, when I had to do some work through the community facilities section at a local council. I had a conversation with a man who worked there (and it was the first of many, unfortunately) that was totally one sided due to his lack of

---

19 Runway is a contemporary art publication based in Sydney Aus.

exchange. It wasn’t that he was dominating the conversation but it was painfully obvious that he wasn’t listening, and he was repeating the same things pretty much over and over. A frozen expression stuck to his face the whole time, only his eyes slowly moved here and there. He never smiled or laughed. I felt a little overwhelmed and zapped of energy after that first meeting with him. I never knew that someone with absolutely no communication or people skills could manage to hold on to a responsible position in a work place that dealt with the public. So he became my prototype, for this theory of a type of death people have while they are still breathing, a death of feelings or something like that. And it was in the same work place, and I wonder if it’s by sheer coincidence, that I met the caretaker who was a self-proclaimed ghost buster. I ended up spending most of my working days going down to the basement listening to the caretaker’s latest ghost busting escapades, and marvelling at how someone so alive seeks out the dead while upstairs there was someone so dead seeking out the living. So I believe in Zombies, just not strictly adhering to the George A Romero’s manifestation. Thinking more along the lines of the traditional mind/state altering Voodoo trance making its way into a contemporary, capitalist and overmedicated consumerist society. Making them at home inhabiting a world where money and power is the god. And where souls are sold to an ideal of accessibility and convenience.

SD: I had a similar neo-zombie experience with an ex-flatmate's mother - talking to her was like falling into quicksand and wishing you could sink faster. The ghost-busting caretaker sounds a lot more interesting. What did he get up to and was he operating in an official council capacity?

CC: No, his true skills were ignored, there were too many lights, locks and chairs that needed repairing. He was quite often placed into the role of afternoon tea man where he would have to go get the milk and cakes. But in the basement he told me about this really difficult job in the Blue Mountains. A house filled with really angry spirits. There was one
that would sit in the car with the lady who resided at the house. She didn't know it, but when her friends happened to see her driving down the street, they would ask her questions about the gentleman in the passenger seat. Anyway, he reckoned that he needed a team for this one. I asked him if I could be a member of the team but he said I didn't have enough experience. I knew I had none, so I didn't push it. After that I went home and started work on a film called *Witness*. I started thinking of the power of energy, in particular the bodies energy how it can make you feel you could do anything. In the film I thought about ideas associated with reanimation. You know, not letting go of something’s potential just because it’s dead. Bringing it back to life, infusing it with energy in some way, I had footage of an extremely large rat that died in the parking lot next door. So I decided to use that, I used basic visual effects to make it look like you could see its life force energy.

**SD:** As you know I live above a psychic, an elderly Scotsman who makes a living communicating with the dead and predicting the future. He doesn’t seem very prescient in his own life, such as knowing when my water heater was about to explode and flood his place downstairs or when he is going to lose his front door keys for the millionth time, but clearly must have some special powers because he’s always busy and has quite a few regular clients. I mention him because you have also tried to contact the dead – most notably The Ramones – using various means such as drug-fuelled trances, hunting for subliminal messages in television static, and even, Australia Post. The exchange, as with your zombie council worker, has always been one-sided – a deafening silence from beyond the grave. I was wondering if you think this kind of metaphysical inquiry is worth pursing or if we are doomed to grope around in the dark forever while Scotsmen get rich on our insecurities?

**CC:** Anything is possible, isn't it? I think I get caught up in everything to do with the rituals or special skills people may have, ways of getting information you may never get
otherwise. There is so much conflicting stuff said and written about what happens when we die. Scanning electronic visual phenomena in the work about The Ramones was an accessible way to look for signs of life after death. I thought of it as an experiment, you know, get a sense of what it feels like to be a devoted fan and try the experiment while sleep deprived and also with the aid of stimulants. My friend used to like reminding me that I was looking and listening to the sound of the beginning of everything. He'd say "Carla you know white noise is the sound of the Big Bang." My reply would be that it’s a good place to look for dead musicians. So I'm not sure what the outcome of these experiments will be, there is a lot of work to do, but I think we should make a pack, if one of us dies the other should be given a sign.

SD: Well, I do like the sound of the Blue Mountains ghost so maybe I’ll come back as a phantom back-seat driver. What’s you’re rego number?

Carla Cescon, Back Road, 2010. Image for Runway article.
Chapter 2 - Horror and its rock n roll aesthetic

In a conversation I had with Vicky Brown\(^{21}\), she made a statement as a summation of my practice to date. She said that the work looked as if it bore testimony to the remnant set of a scary movie revealing a sensibility that lies somewhere between schlock and thriller. There is within each installation reflections of human conditions like humour and fear of reality and fiction. The aesthetic undertow is downright raw and dirty like rock’n’roll in an old, damp pub. That while the work spoke of common identifiable themes it looked as if it had sprung from somewhere dark and at the same time propelled by a sense of lightness and spontaneity.

Artifacts of a western contemporary pop culture especially movies and music feature in the conceptual nature of my work. A blend of context and content occurs during the merge of ideas that relate to the art making process. I keep in mind the possibility of a continuation with the artworks progressive state after the initial installation. I’ve used communicative tools specifically belonging to the research of paranormal activity. By taping white noise on video, it’s believed that there is a possibility of connecting with the dead through image in static manifesting through the television screen. This is known as electronic visual phenomena (E.V.P). By experimenting with elements of parapsychology and shown comparably to the way a fan or collector may acquire any material on a favourite band, it was possible to combine two of my favourite things rock n roll and horror of the unknown. This was exemplified in 100 Days and nights in Search of the Ramones. A further inquiry into this idea was reflected in a reworking of a Patti Smith song We Three, which turned the song lyrics into an audience driven, participatory story-board illustrating common motives that drive our complicated relationships.

---

\(^{21}\) Vicky Brown is visual/ sound artist currently living and working in the Blue Mountains.
Materials and object were placed together in an attempt to confer on the works spontaneous energetic and unfinished look. The imbedded aesthetic sense under which rides everything I do stems from a childhood interest in the special effects made by Ray Harryhousen\(^{22}\) and shows like Night Stalker and the Twilight Zone also having had an impact. Vampire films of the 30’s through to the 70’s from Nosferatu to Dracula and those that involved werewolves like The Wolfman and An American Werewolf in London seemed so dark and gothic, nothing like the world in which I was growing up. A graduation to Zombies and themes that involved the supernatural were the next stage in the evolution of my movie loving experience. I’m interested in the way the horror film genre is divided up into subsections, like the horror of personality, the horror of Armageddon, the horror of the demonic and the slasher film. Reflecting a single common fear that seems to permeate though society every ten years or so.

From these sources monsters and scenarios from scary movies have become a visual and conceptual foundation. Inherent in their metaphors are analogies for conditions in life as I see it, and the basis for art making as I produce it. I concur with George A. Romero’s\(^{23}\) statement explaining the premise for his film making styles and themes being; “that everyone in the world is operating at some level of insanity. You know, the old question, what is sane, what is insane?”\(^{24}\)

Themes of art and madness today are pretty much a cliché, obvious in such stories that illustrate portraits of the artist as a stubborn, antisocial, often self harming person bargaining hard won aesthetic enterprises against a mercantile system. However far-fetched and old these visions may seem now, there are many other behaviours that don’t just belong

\(^{22}\) Ray Harryhousen pioneered stop animation special effects using small models of mythical creatures like Cyclops Medusa and Kraken

\(^{23}\) George A Romero filmmaker based in the US. Responsible for the Living Dead series.

\(^{24}\) Derry, Charles Dark Dreams, a psychological history of the modern horror film A.S. Barnes & Co.Inc. 1977
to the artist and whilst not quite as mainstream as an obvious picture of insanity, the artist enterprise is nonetheless, pretty much lunacy. Fairly common are the obsessions with objects or with people. Famous people as celebrities, becoming objects or commodities through the various guises in which they are renown. Obsessions such as these viewed from a certain perspective appear a little crazy, and are so much part of contemporary globalised western cultures that they seem the most normal thing in the world.

A lot of people spend a lot of time and energy following their favourite celebrities, watching, reading and waiting for news, wanting to share in all their failures and suffering. In particular, the suffering and even death of personalities, just so as to bare witness to the “humanness” and normality of celebrities who might otherwise seem beyond our own mere ordinary selves? Such figures really do seem fictitious, with tabloids reporting dramas with impossible highs and tragic lows embellished and pitted against other celebrities leading lifestyles that literally haunt all levels of a vampiric society.

During my candidature I exhibited works that relate to the clichéd way film and television portrays some kind of insanity. Often this is presented and evidenced through an all-consuming behavioral trait, like an odd reclusive tendency accompanied by masses of drawings or text, and specific paraphernalia that supposedly highlights something very particular. In history these traits have often been attributed to the mad artist, scientist or collector. Often thought of as, the maniacally obsessed.

These works impart the feeling of being part of a stage set or a story in progress, perhaps belonging to a thriller or a mise-en-scene to a movie. The gallery visitor becomes the camera panning the area at 360 degrees unfolding the story at own pace and building the script scenario through object, placement and lighting.

The works made during my candidature; *We three, Last Dance-a close reading, Camps and outposts/ an exercise in communication, Wish I had been there, The Apartment* and *The Last Girl*
Phenomena are a carry on from Nightcrawlers and Shapeshifters 100 days and nights in search of the Ramones. Also, in my involvement with collaborative artist groups such as ICAN\textsuperscript{25} and Alterbeast\textsuperscript{26} that use the gallery site as a work in movement.

At the core of the work, Night Crawlers and Shape Shifters 100 Days in Search of the Ramones, lies within the diary account of an obsessive Fans’ attempt to contact deceased members of the Ramones using Electronic Visual Phenomena. I authored the diary of a vigil that I undertook (as the fan), aiming to translate it as a stage set, and as a layered place to formulate the merging of imagination, possible psychosis and reality.

100 days and nights in search of the Ramones, 2007 Wall detail of installation.

The diary is an account of a vigil, spanning 100 days, and uses text as a chronicle to the process of setting up and sustaining a vigil. A bid to explain the daily progress and non-progress with monitoring the activity of static and noise on television sets, in the hope of witnessing any sign

\textsuperscript{25} The Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown is a gallery and sometime collaborative artist group.

\textsuperscript{26} Alterbeast an artist group made up of myself, Mikala Dwyer and Tina Havelock-Stevens
from the Ramones. The manual tells of the ups and downs (mainly the downs) of attempting to recruit people in order to widen the vigil’s scope. The manual also places into context some of the supposedly unrelated or odd imagery that get included due to the side effects of limited sleep. Ordinary events or objects are fused with fantasied possibilities like big black shapes and things crawling in the corners of the room. The sound and pattern from the video of taped white noise came from the TV sets making an edgy ambience its musical score.

“100 days and nights in search of the Ramones” explored a diary experience that was written across the wall forming a set that included drawing, sculpture, monitors and cast objects that performed a pseudo-psychic connection between object and subject. This inferred an evolution of the works on-going life with imagery and experience - evident within the installation of wall text and video. I consider the approach of laying open the diarised account as wall text and the continuous play back of white noise conceptual and analytic as much as it is poetic and existential. The diary chronicled just that “100 days and nights in search of the Ramones” done in the studio and also though the examination and playback of white noise via television. Part of the 20th century and right up to the present saw mediums using electronic visual phenomena as a tool to contact people who have died. Throughout my 100-day vigil no such contact was made with Dee Dee, Johnny, or Joey Ramone. However other issues arose, like, maintaining a focus, being a fan and coping with the reality of life, solitude and lack of sleep. These were the key instigators/influence for the final work with the diary as its foundation.

27 The Ramones were a seminal Punk band recognised for the professional seriousness with which they could not play their instruments. Ramones carved a highly influential do-it-yourself niche for themselves in the contemporary musical firmament. The deaths of the three Ramones in relatively quick succession, therefore, was reported as signaling the end of a musical era.
100 days and nights in search of the Ramone’s 2007 gallery installation view.

The installation utilised various media, to set the room up as a work-station. Fulfilling the criterion of an electronic visual phenomena experimental site were the tables, TV’s, tapes, recorders and paper, transcribed text onto walls, pieces of paper and letters and with television becoming the medium for sound and video.

Also a booklet published as a manual was available for distribution.

Part of the site, including some of the televisions and rats were molded and cast in urethanes where as the imaginary objects like the giant commas as well as the smaller full stops were made out of paper and glue covering a wire frame.

The following is an excerpt from the gallery essay provided at Artspace during the exhibition, an analogy that allows the work of art to fall into the context of it being a work in movement open to other people’s observation and understanding. In this view the writer likened the process of using domestic electronic devices to connect to the supernatural to a particular cinematic experience of his.

“Here it is easy to make analogies with the French writer/director/artist Jean Cocteau’s 1950 film
Orphée, a recasting of the classical Greek fable of the bard Orpheus who journeys to the underworld to save his doomed lover Eurydice, while seeking poetic inspiration in the land of the dead. In Cocteau’s post-WWII account, Orphée is a famous poet, institutionally lauded by the state yet reviled by the new generation. The famed writer seeks revived inspiration in the seemingly absurd ‘surreal’ verses of the much younger, yet recently killed poet, Jacques Cégeste. These are broadcast, under instruction from the character Death (a black-clad femme-fatale), through the poet’s car radio; the vital poetry of youth is rescued from death and returned to the world via the electronic media.”

It continues with; “In Cescon’s installation, such vitality is restored to the gallery spaces of Artspace, at least symbolically, by way of the guidance of the dead. The Ramones defiant, yet undoubtedly quasi-ironic, self-invention is echoed in the determinedly hand-made quality of Cescon’s objects. Like the Ramones music, these defy preciousness embracing instead a deliberately ramshackle creative identity, that also like that of the Ramones (how exaggeratedly pale and skinny they were!) is vaguely ghoulish. What is equally suggestive in Cescon’s constructed environment is the artist’s poetic critique of the potentially fine line separating creative self-invention from narcissistic longing for self-escape; enlightened self-awareness from all-consuming irrational obsession. Even more suggestive though in this work is the indication that these worlds repeatedly resist convenient separation. In fact, as the artist Goya so rightly observed, excess rationality is as insane, if not more so, than the most fixated of soporific obsessions. The intermingling of fantasy and reality is so constitutive of everyday existence that attempting to definitively state where one ends and the other leaves off is ridiculous. It is in this sense that Cescon, rather than merely taking the supernatural at face value, plays a double game of dissimulation. Through her work, the artist entices the audience; forcing us to simultaneously question the extent of our ingenuousness and disbelief.”

---

28 Gawronski, Alex The Double Screen gallery essay for 100 days and nights in search of the Ramones
29 Ibid
“We Three” July 2008,

The lyrics to Pattie Smith’s song of the same title, was divided into sections where I thought three characters could be formed from the lyrics. It became a scenario made up of three would-be lovers. The main character, the dog, longs for the horse that in turn longs for another, the ox. Turning progressively into a play with all three characters either speaking, being spoken to or spoken about. I started the project off with a skeletal dialogue between a dog, a horse and an ox. I thought to give the reading spectator the chance to be involved in a kind of process of truth, thinking within the terms outlined by Pierre Huyghe “a way to explore other possibilities of exchange” or Gabriel Orozco “together in the everyday” and with a declaration from Nicholas Bourriaud “the group is pitted against the mass, neighbourliness against propaganda, low tech against high tech, and the tactile against the visual. And above all, the everyday now turns out to be a much more fertile terrain than popular culture” Sheets of paper were laid ready on a table with a black marker for changes and amendments to be made by anybody interested.

We Three 2008, Carla Cescon, mixed media installation

---

30 Bourriaud, Nicolas “Relational Aesthetics” Les presses du reel 1998
The outcome produced by the public’s interaction made many changes involving extra conversation between the animals. Eclectic scene changes were added with an influx of background information. Rounding off the characters in different ways to what I had originally intended. What started out to be a quiet ordered room display of characters represented by masks, clothing and text, ended up becoming a disorder of messages, paper debris with extra arms and legs added to the props in a comedic manner; totally irreverent.

_Last Dance/ A close reading March 2009_,

Carla Cescon, _Last Dance/ a close reading 2009_ front of installation view.

I wanted to design a space that gave the impression of melancholia and anxiety, yet at the same time hinting at an absurd visualisation of a particular state of mind. I am interested in
making assemblages through installation that trigger particular ways of feeling. In this version it had to be the feeling of isolation and the manifestation of a hallucinatory experience. The following comes from the media release to the exhibition.

Helpful hint;

*I thought before coming to the show it maybe useful to watch Roman Polanski’s Repulsion with Catherine Deneuve. Failing that, you could try Absolutely Fabulous Series 3, Episode six, titled The End. Patsy has a fight with Eddie and finds herself alone and out of place in New York. The enormity of her solitude is overwhelming and she has a Catherine Deneuve moment, where her anxieties reach a critical point as in a scene from the movie Repulsion, the hysterical mind, manifests the illusion of being groped by disembodied hands in a confined space.

In Absolutely Fabulous it’s at this point that Eddie appears (in a helicopter) making for an emotional rescue. The character in repulsion isn’t so lucky.

Carla Cescon *Last Dance* 2009 behind the curtain with detail

Last Dance (a close reading) is a work that requires the viewer to trace objects in the gallery space; Georges Perec puts it nicely in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*;

“There are few events which don’t leave a written trace at least. At one time or another, almost everything passes through a sheet of paper, the page of a notebook, or the diary, or some other chance support (a metro ticket, the margin of a newspaper, a cigarette packet,
the back of an envelope etc.) on which, at varying speeds and by a different technique depending on the place, time or mood, one or another of the miscellaneous elements that comprise the everydayness of life comes to be inscribed.”

_Last dance (a close reading)_ used the space as split in two, both physically and metaphorically by a half draped drop sheet. The front space feels like a place of quietude like a park. Small figurines of carved birds rest on a small wooden bench. A hand bound book made of red blank pages lay on the floor next to it, above hung a paper lantern sprayed black, with a red globe. Beside the bench lay another lantern sprayed black with a white light. The light shade gave a domestic feel with the spray on colour forcing the light emitted to shine differently, as if somebody made the light turn to black smothering its purpose so that it appears emotive rather than helpful. If you sat on the bench a crude mask was visible as it was plastered onto the wall above the door. On one side the power outlets had been covered over by a piece of kneaded plaster that was stiff, acting like a mask that hindered access to the possible energy source. Nestled in the backdrop on the floor was a plaster dog that appeared cast as either sleeping or dead. Getting up from the bench, there was “I was here,” engraved repeatedly in a shadow-like cast in the wood. The engraving was made up of text which outlined the shape of a pressure imprint as though on cushions. The space behind the bench opened out to the second aspect of the installation; an alternative space. This section of the piece was unseen due to the drop sheet that hung like a falling drape and acted as if it were placed where the hallucination took place. The illusion was illustrated by using hand made plaster hands that appeared to come out of the walls.

__________________________

31Perec, Georges Species of Spaces and Other Pieces Editions Galilee, 1974
Others appeared to have fallen to the floor and in the action that looked as if the hands had moved toward the viewer, become knotted and frozen.

Plastered into the wall, roughly in the middle was a clump of matted black hair and opposite this on the adjacent wall was a hand crafted doll made of plasticized plaster with its own tuft of black hair, acting somewhat like a mirror. The lighting for this room was dim giving an overall melancholic edge; felt like the energy of the room had been depleted or absorbed by something else. There was the feeling of being guided by objects, the viewer directed in the same way you might tackle a close reading. Clues given through metaphor (rather than a text issued) gave rise to explanations that might differ from person to person. The work makes plain that the use of the front space is representative of an exterior emotive place, and that which sat behind the drop sheet as a psychological place active with imaginary possibilities, a paranoid space.

*Camps and outposts, an exercise with communication*/ October 2009

The next work was part of an exhibition held at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery that focused on resurfacing the reality TV show Sylvania Waters. It aired on the ABC in 1990 and was based on the Donahur family, Lorrie, Nolene their sons Michael and Paul and Paul’s wife Dione. The series was filmed mainly in the home of Nolene and Lorrie where their son Michael also lived, in Sylvania Waters. I made work that focused on Nolene’s relationship with her sons.

The Program Sylvania waters really set the aesthetic and for me it was an exercise in producing or exemplifying an ugliness that is often seen in reality television these days. I wanted to mix the use of bought furnishings with customised hand made props as it references to the work done by Iza Genkins\(^\text{32}\) (primarily the work she did at Munster 2007)

---

\(^{32}\) Isa Genzkens german artist currently living and working in Germany
and Olaf Breuning’s the "ugly"\textsuperscript{33} series and how sculptural bits and pieces (found object and those manufactured) are expressed through installed scenarios. Specifically those that relate to people and their behaviour, using as tools, clothing, furnishings and knick-knacks, manufactured items designed on mass and sold to a domestic market.

In Sylvania waters Nolene was pretty much perceived as the diva and a struggling matriarch. She becomes the centre hub of comings and goings with all the information and communication being filtered through her. When there was no communication between Paul and Nolene they were both talking about the non communication to an anonymous person listening just off screen, presumably the film maker. I liked the idea of mixing the way people talk in real life and that, which is chosen to make it on the screen at the discretion of the filmmakers.

Connection between artist and viewer and the implication of this is of a primary concern. Here the work creates an experiential event or outcome. Guattari outlines aesthetics as “a model for a new ethical behaviour opposed to capitalist rationality. Art is a process of becoming: a fluid and partially autonomous zone of activity that works against disciplinary boundaries, yet which is inseparable from its integration in the social field.”\textsuperscript{34}

Promising an ongoing public engagement, where the visitor is called upon directly to participate within the project as part of a staged event. In a sense allowing the element of disorder to decide the outcome and progression. I believe the connection between the public and the ongoing practice of the artist is an important area of exploration.

An installation was made up of 3 areas or sections, there was the main one that was placed inside, within the gallery, this was the "mother camp" and it hosted a wall tableau that represented Nolene. I made an effigy made of canvas and I dressed it in clothes that

\textsuperscript{33} Cantz, Hatje Ugly Catalogue of work by Ulaf Bruenning (Swiss) published in 2001

\textsuperscript{34} Felix Guattari, Chaosmosis Galilee Editions, Paris 1992
reminded me of Nolene, it had a photo transfer for a face so it looked like her. She sat on a chair that levitated, I thought the levitation was important as it symbolised an elevated state of consciousness and wondered if the high she would have felt being the focus of a brand new TV show was like that, being the chosen one, an exemplary symbol of the Australian family.

Carla Cescon. *Mother Camp* 2009. Interior work connected to outside work via walky-talky

On the shelf were two walky talky units that could be picked up and communicated on, these were connected to the 2 outposts outside and I added the family dog as a gesture the idea being, that the animal is welcome on the inside while the kids do it tough on the outer, the dog representing a family member that doesn’t talk back. I placed a small *golly*-wog next to the Nolene effigy on the chair because in a couple of episodes she talks about the exotic black male stripper they hired for Dione’s hens night, but also there are scenes where a discussion started on fostering of a child from Bernardos. They talk about the ideal child
being of different race, Lorie her husband preferring little girls. The wallpaper that lined the wall the objects hung against was sprayed with a silver flecked pattern and it resembled the wallpaper that was in the family kitchen. A hint of a bench comes out of the wall and a picture of Elvis that I roughly replicated and I thought ended up looking like Lorie, hangs on the wall. The set up inside had objects that were representative and a place that possibly received noise from the outside with viewers using the two-way radios. The radios symbolized in a simplistic way the need for contact no matter how horrible or dissatisfying a one-way conversation might turn out. In the TV show conversation was always a struggle, it felt self-conscious and forced, and pretty much based on words that didn't say much at all. "The outposts” were small telephone style booths that represented Nolene’s children so one is devoted to Michael and the other Paul and his wife Dionne.

The Michael outpost has an effigy of him as a canvas rag doll with a photo transfer of his face as the head. The effigy was tied to the booth and the booth houses a Walky Talky. I shopped for decorations connected to the Michael outpost, footy boots, scarf, shirt and shorts.

Carla Cescon, Outposts 2009 exterior work
The Paul and Dionne outpost also featured effigies like the other two I described. Although this time the two are joined as one and are tied together with their baby (the couple producing an extra member of the Donahur family that emerged and featured during the filming of Sylvania Waters), a walky talky inside the booth, I also shopped for the couple getting them a basinet and a beach umbrella. The booth stands were set in cement, I coloured the top.

*A poster for Tom Verlaine* June 2010

I took a photograph of the band Television from the television, a DVD that had snippets of performances from bands playing at CB GB’s in the 1970’s and I found myself wishing I had been there. I wrote *I wish I had been there 1975 CBGB’s*. The photograph became a print and I embellished it with jewelry-like objects and handmade moulds of hands gesturing “rock-on” suspended from a silver chain. The print was pinned to the wall and the chain with objects hung in front.

*The Apartment, No.1* August 2010

The apartment was an installation made up of three parts. Drawings on paper that hung on the wall, a three-minute movie played through a monitor and three objects on the floor. Each aspect of the installation symbolically played a part in relation to the other. A role-played through inanimate objects that suggested an involvement with the audience’s ability to work out the symbols, a concern with identity and sanity, and ultimately the result of the search which is the most frightening thing. “Who am I”, a recurring theme of identity, that fits into the horror-of-personality films of the sixties. The spreading concern with what seems to be a fear of the possible innate insanity and violence in man. The exhibition was
held at *Death Be Kind* a concept space in Melbourne. The work came about after the sudden move from living with other people in a house to a smaller more compact place, an Apartment. I started to watch horror genre movies that were concerned with identity, like *Whatever happened to baby Jane, Psycho, Shock Treatment, Butterfly Kiss, Peeping Tom* and *What’s the Matter with Helen?* I found common threads in the symbology when it came to film techniques as a way to get the point across, like the actors face or hands reflected in mirrors. Other mirror references appeared by using dolls/manikins photographs and painted images and portraits. At *Death Be Kind* the installation had a series of B&W stencil posters made up of text and pattern. The posters fell to the floor from above head height. In the forefront lay a full size black wigged manikin dressed in coat, stockings and shoes laying on her front with head tilted to the side hair covering face in a random style. To the side of her on the floor lies a doll-sized version of the manikin. Between them is a sharp long bladed knife just out of reach of the hand of the larger manikin. The doll has a knife imbedded in the chest.

To the side of where the posters hang on the wall and the manikin’s lie on the floor, is a monitor playing a looped video. The video was roughly edited displaying scenes from an apartment building with the opening shot, a slow and jolting climb up the stairwell to a door. The next shot is the view from the peephole, through the round viewfinder shape a figure is seen moving and looking through the other end. The camera then cuts to the image of a young child standing and staring. In the next a disembodied forearm attempts to unlock the safety chain through the small gap that is made after attempting to enter. This looks violent, quickly going to the next scene where a woman runs naked along a river. The movie then returns to the stairwell with the camera moving as if it were looking through the eyes of somebody in an altered state of consciousness.

*The Apartment No. 2 the final girl theory (sept 3rd-19th) install at Ican*

This final work to accompany my candidature is a mix of The Apartment No 1 and its evolution to the next stage of production as introducing analogue radios and a transceiver. A work that could remain open in a continuation of changing formats highlighting this as it occurred in the modern horror film genre. In film the focus on threads or themes change every ten years or so, changes that mirror current concerns or fears and that are prominent in a cultural consciousness. I wanted to mix the idea of the final girl featured in slasher horror films (*Friday the Thirteenth, Halloween, Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Eaten Alive, Psycho*) and the two-way radio featured in Armageddon horror films (*Flesh Eating Zombie’s, Day of the Dead, Diary of the Dead, On the Beach, The Day After Tomorrow*)

The work will incorporate electronic media such as sound and video to construct a sculptural installation. Various electronic devices selected/collected from the last three decades will create an island of boom boxes, monitors, TV’s, two way radios and recorders, with the wires descending in a central column from the gallery ceiling. The physical shape of the sculpture connecting the ceiling with the floor through electrical currents highlights
the transition from material reality (ground) to the spiritual (sky). In this work, the viewer is invited to listen for traces of sound elements either, voice, melody or image that may be of personal significance, this becoming a modem to communicate with the dead through a workstation of familiar transmission devices. The viewer is encouraged to listen with headsets to the white noise in order to decipher apparent signs from the afterlife. The presence of the voices of the dead in white noise is known as Electronic Voice Phenomena. The use of these trusted devices to engage with paranormal experience illustrates a tenuous balance between pragmatism and superstition.

Carla Cescon, *The Apartment/final girl theory* 2010. Invitation to MVA Exhibition
Carla Cescon, *The Apartment/final girl theory* 2010. Installation room view

Carla Cescon, The Apartment/final girl theory 2010. Still from video

Carla Cescon, The Apartment/final girl theory 2010. Photograph with wiring installation detail.
Chapter 3- Collaborating with other artists and written projects

My involvement with The Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown (ICAN) is as a co-director of the gallery space along with fellow colleagues Scott Donovan and Alex Gawronski. As a side project we started to collaborate, making what we considered ideal shows, to fill in for mismanaged organisation within the calendar of events.

Mark Foster was a made-up artist coming from Perth, whose (fictional) aim was collecting street posters that made him feel like he had an insight into what might be happening in the city where he was exhibiting. So in a way he became the institute of contemporary art’s resident radicant35 He personified what Nicholas Bourriaud terms as radicant, an artist who plants roots and can translate through artwork comments relevant to where ever they are. Artist’s that comment by research and experiences on the place with which they have been invited to exhibit and make comment unhindered by traditions.

ICAN as Mark Foster 2010, exhibition view

Mark Foster is neither female nor male just represented by a name that assumes he is male.

35 Concept and title of publication by Nicolas Bourriaud
Mark’s show at the Institute Of Contemporary Art Newtown used elements of street posters from nearby electricity poles and combined them to make a large collage centralised within the gallery space on a three-sided billboard stand. On the second side of the stand was a projected video, which acted like a filmic collage, a cut-up of footage from live rock'n'roll acts like Iggy Pop and the New York dolls and street scenes from New York. The third side had a graffiti slogan painted in red and it read “I CAN FEEL HIM IN ME” a sentence that could be understood as either religious or sexual.

Another ICAN project was the creation of a political group Sesto Quinto that we imagined should of and could of existed in 1975. We thought that if the group had functioned as we imagined it to, the members would have wanted to reform now, just like so many bands in recent years have regrouped to perform live music shows; New York Dolls, Television, Blondie, Lou Reed’s Metal Machine Music. Quinto Sesto was staged at The Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown (gallery) in 2008 and at Ocular Lab Brunswick Victoria in 2009. The following text was written for the media release.

Quinto Sesto; Fighting for Peace (1975-76)

In June 1975 Quinto Sesto, an unregistered pacifist group, was formed in Sydney. Little is known about the activities of this collective. The NSW State and Federal Police listed them as a subversive organisation although their actions broke few laws and failed to capture the imagination of the public or indeed, other 70’s peace groups. In fact, Quinto Sesto was more generally written off as a public nuisance not to be taken seriously.

The group, whose core comprised four members and a ‘guest’, were activated by the general political and social tumult of the era. Like many, they were deeply angered by the Vietnam War as well as outraged by the summary sacking of the Whitlam government in November 1975. Furthermore, they were inspired by those they viewed as international fellow travellers like the Weather Underground, the Symbionese Liberation Army and the Black Panthers as well as John Lennon and Yoko Ono, to name a few.

However, unlike most of these organisations Quinto Sesto harboured artistic aspirations. One of its founders Warren (aka. Sesto) Mitchell also wrote poetry, song lyrics and plays. Such ambitions culminated in the group’s attempt to encompass their political aims in the form of a rock-opera
partially inspired by The Who’s ‘visionary’ enterprise ‘Tommy’, also released in 1975. Unfortunately, Quinto Sesto’s own aborted production ‘Fighting for Peace’, like most of the group’s activities, barely got off the ground due to lack of collective coherence and talent. It exists today only as series of musical sketches and some crudely scrawled, heavily derivative lyrics. By mid 1976, Quinto Sesto, a failed activist and artistic entity, finally imploded under the combined pressures of internal bickering and excessive drug taking.

In this exhibition at Ocular Lab, the Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown presents documents, artifacts and memorabilia associated with Quinto Sesto on loan from one of its surviving members. Included also are recreations of some of the events associated with the group’s attempts to write and perform a genuinely ‘political’ musical. Instructive for what happens when ambition exceeds ability, Quinto Sesto remain a significant, if under-recognised entity emerging from the dim recesses of Australian political and artistic ‘folk’ history.

There are parallels to D H Lawrence’s Kangaroo, where Richard and Harriett Somers arrive in Australia escaping a post war Europe hoping for a new and freer life. Richard, a
disillusioned writer, becomes involved with an extreme political group. At its head is the charismatic Kangaroo.

The references continue in Ern Malley the controversial and fictional poet that was the central figure in Australia’s most celebrated literary hoaxes. Malley was a construct of James McAuley and Harold Stewart and the fictitious writer became widely read. Malleys poems and supposed autobiography became successful both in Australia and in the US.

**A psychological collaboration with the artist/Locust Jones.**

During my candidature Locust Jones asked me to write a piece to accompany his exhibition at Gallery9 in 2009. I was reading *The Radicant* and had just re-watched *Brazil* and *1984*. Both I felt, contributed to the text’s outcome. I knew Jones was caught up in conspiratorial theories, and projected angry slogans and streams of text, on his drawings. Text related to the horrors of everyday life, as well as, what was idiosyncratic to his sense of duty. Making a point to not talk to Jones about the work (apart from the title of the show) and relying on how a relationship to it may develop. I was thinking that the experience alone was enough to inspire some sort of connection. I felt this would be a good example of a psychological collaboration with the artist teased out through a piece of text.

*All But Dead.*

There is something in the works of Locust Jones that makes me think for a second, that someone has spiked my drink with a hallucinogen, I’m watching news flashes, in particular,
one titled *Hitchhiking in the donut of death* and it’s all been specially brought to me by Emotocorp an organization that specializes in hijacking your brain to translate code.

Ok, so it’s not true. My mind hasn’t literally been tampered with, but confronted nonetheless by a mess of details in the form of image and text overlaying patterns and sometimes colour bursts usually limited to blues, reds and yellows. The need to read the text and image seems paramount. There is a search to define what it is that’s going on. I still see a code in need of translation and believe it’s one that derives from diarised notes made in response to reading newspapers, watching the news, all this mixed up with how it is that Jones is feeling at the time. I read the works like a terrain of art, each appearing to take you through a zoom in/zoom out technique that touches on broad reality then focusing introspectively, quasi psychological.

So Locust Jones is Emotocorp?! The media news regurgitation, working within a combat formation of linguistic distortion where fidelity and treason become elements of Jones’ position, which I suspect, is a strategy mapped and translated as recorded events like military occupation or controversial political policy, sourced from the internet and news media, then using image and text and relating this metaphorically to the commonplace, making it odd or absurd.

Taking the title of the show *Hitchhiking in the donut of death* I queried Jones on it’s origin, to which he mentioned watching a clip on You Tube about *the donut of death*, in which a guy was doing donuts in his car and he got out while the car was still circling and it ran him over. Excited by the find, and making a leap to his own experience, “but my donut of death

37 Emotocorp” a fictitious word derived from combining the words emotion and corporation.
comes from the CT Scanner they put you in when they suspect there is something wrong
with you. I have been in one before, claustrophobic, lack of space”. So the camera in my
mind’s eye zooms in to search for clues and signs of medical analysis, contextualised
thoughts scrawled in conscious streams mixed with drawings that act as invocations of
desire, anger, obsession, torture, an open diary continues. The hallucinogenic effect comes
with Jones’ diaryed form of storytelling of intersecting accounts relating to connections
between multiple environments.

Take *Prowlers at the Proving Ground* 2008 a 500cm ink drawing, an epic construction of
image narrative/multiple narratives. An analysis of imagined marching, shooting, pensive,
soldier-like people squashed amongst oilrig platforms, tanks, tankers and watch houses.
The text gets washed away in a blur, but then there are groups of civilians standing in
groups along with stagnant portraits that hover around the edges. Curiously I find myself
relating (though removed by circumstance) to one of the more relaxed figures passively
watching yet still part of the shitty upheavals due to the fact that I belong to the human
race. The work’s medium looks like a hybrid mix of oil, blood, and the darkest of shadows
concocted by the mind of spin-doctors at *Emotocorp*. Jones, now becoming an agent for
*Emotocorp* in this essay and in a bid to lure and make believe, wants you to become party
to the exploitation of vulnerability and to propagate its partner, violence. The mesmeric
patterns made by the repetition in mark making draw you there… acknowledging the fact
that the world is one big complicated mess.

**Alterbeast**

Alterbeast exists primarily as a core group of three people who work combining sound,
video, performance and props in conventional galleries as an unfinished, open-ended
installation. Our aim is to make the viewer work as hard as we have. Ideas are tackled all at once with irreverence and respect.

Our first exhibition was held at Gertrude Centre of Contemporary Art. The focal work in the show was a projected video titled “Poo Zombies” with a sound track composed of drumbeats. Plus five other works that were installed about the space. We asked two artists from Sydney to contribute work that kept in mind the idea that there is another kind of beast. One of your own doing, or one that possibly exists right under your nose.

The background to our Poo Zombies 2010 digital video projection started with stories from locals who were involved in the citizen panels of the Kings Cross area. Where members of the community get together to meet and talk about what’s happening in the neighbourhood and the council gets feedback on issues of concern. We were told that the meetings encourage residents to get involved in plans and changes and have their say. It was after one of these events that a colleague who lives in Kings Cross mentioned to Mikala and me, an odd phenomenon. Residents had been talking about concerns they had regarding the overwhelming amount of human excrement that littered the back streets on a Saturday and Sunday morning. Industrial cleaners were seen in the early hours of the morning. She also mentioned a multi national corporation that owns a large entertainment venue on Coogee’s waterfront and also one in Kings Cross, it was said that the venues had a private bus, which they called the Pumpkin Bus to commute people after lockout from the Coogee venue up to the Cross to the other club (owned by the same patron) that had longer trading hours. The thought was that the Cross, had gone from being a red light district to a heavily marketed zone for bars and dance clubs, resulting in an overload of clubbers in an area that doesn’t have adequate amenities and services.

So we took our friend Tina (Documentary film maker and Mumps drummer), and searched for signs of a suburb in chaos.
What we found though, were streams of people mostly under 30 cramming the sidewalks, roads and fast food restaurants, absent of engagement or joy, standing in queues to clubs with the occasional fight, vomit and staggered walk.

Despite the huge number of people on the streets there seemed to be an overwhelming sense of disparity and individuals seemed to stare, wait and wonder around, sometimes grabbing on to the next person, sometimes falling. We started to call them zombies and they really did take on characteristics that George A Romero’s made famous with films like *Night of the Living Dead, Dawn of the Dead, Land of the Dead* and *Diary of the Dead*.

The street, traffic and car lights became the theatrical lighting we needed for tension and anticipation. The crowded sidewalks saw people spilling onto the road with the kind of impatience that made me think of mass exodus. People walking in a constant stream up and down the streets blind to everything except traces of life, the people acted as one common body. Seeing couples kissing couldn’t be interpreted as romantic because, at the movies it’s the part where everything seems as it should be but then, you’re confronted with the horror realisation that it’s a slow deliberate attack. The zombie feeds off live flesh. Fights therefore became struggles between zombies and those who still hold on to their life force and enjoy surviving by killing them. The camera taking on the perspective of a makeshift army made up of survivors confined to a safety bubble yet compelled to survey the extent of the chaos, attempting to make sense of a changing world.

I have included a written review by Megan Robsin intended for Runway magazine, extending the process through a critical eye.

*Alterbeast*

*Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces*

*5 – 27 March 2010*
In Alterbeast, a group exhibition at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Carla Cescon, Mikala Dwyer, Grzegorz Gawronski, Rachel Scott and Tina Havelock Stevens explored the manifestation of horror in the everyday. From the faux terror of Cescon’s crafted werewolf and zombie, to Scott’s unnerving video of a completely exposed woman, the exhibition encompassed the broad spectrum of contemporary horror, from the real to the fictitious.

Alterbeast also experimented with the processes of exploration, exchange and exhibition. The participating artists were brought together by Dwyer for a project described as partway between a ‘group show and a messy collaboration’⁵⁸. In this regard, the exhibition acted as an informal forum, a space designed for discussion and comparison.

The first work encountered upon entering the space was Gawronski’s Untitled (2010), which allowed the viewer to watch the reaction of a mix of chemicals — potassium bromate, sulphuric acid, potassium bromide and malonic acid — in a wall-mounted holding tank. Behind the glass panel, substances bubbled and coagulated in a process that the artist referred to as an “order for free”⁵⁹. Untitled was at once beautiful and disquieting, as the chemicals actively moved behind the pane to form organic abstract patterns independent of both the artist and the viewer. The work evoked a chemical Frankenstein scenario, in which the creation has developed its own free will and sovereignty. Untitled also drew visual parallels with the satellite photographs of large-scale environmental disasters like the Deepwater Horizon leak in the Gulf of Mexico, that are becoming frightening commonplace and seem impervious to any outside intervention.

Dwyer’s installation Alterbeast Objects (2010) consisted of 5 ‘anti-objects’ of various sizes and heights that congregated in a semi-circular shape on the floor of the gallery. The objects were covered in black fabric held down by misshapen donut-like clay weights tied to the corners. The weights featured decorative tassel tails in bright colours protruding from the indented surface. Alterbeast Objects took on a quality somewhere between the ridiculous and the frightening. The work played with our fear of the unknown, provoking the viewer with the idea that beneath the black shrouds hideous and deformed forms could be uncovered at any moment.

Scott’s eerie video Untitled featured a young woman (the artist), naked and alone, in the clearing of a forest in what appeared to be the very early hours of the morning. Standing completely still, the woman makes neither a sound nor any movement, and her reflection in the pond in the foreground of the frame barely ripples. Eventually a dog moves through the clearing, but it is oblivious to the

⁵⁸ Email correspondence with Mikala Dwyer, 18 May 2010
⁵⁹ Alterbeast, Press Release, Gertrude Street Contemporary Art Spaces, 2010
presence of the artist. The video uses the absence of an event to build up a sense of anticipation and foreboding — the artist screaming into the silent surrounds finally breaks the tension. Described as a ‘digital video performance’ the physical release of sound by Scott is an act that encompasses her whole body. The concept of isolation that underpins the idea of horror in literature or film is magnified to great effect in Untitled. The creepy, unnerving atmosphere that is created when one is all-alone and the dearth of urban sounds gives rise to imaginings of the most terrible kind. The scream that ruptures the stillness of the clearing, also serves to shock the viewer out of his or her own hysterical imaginings.

Wyldwood (2009), a visceral painting by Scott was also included in the exhibition. A mix of browns, orange, yellow, green and black paint applied with heavy, extended brush strokes formed the background of the work. Spurted across the top of the painting was a lurid, neon pink paint, and the gestural forms reminiscent of an action painting or the blood splatter of a brutal murder in a CSI-style television crime show.

Cescon’s installation I swapped my stool for a swivel chair (2010) included two archetypal protagonists of the horror genre, the zombie and the werewolf. Set amongst an assemblage of domestic props, including a desk lamp, which served as a makeshift spotlight, the zombie and the werewolf had a deliberate homemade craft quality that evoked a low budget horror film. The craft aesthetic also extended to the stool and swivel chair of the title, which had the slightly awkward form of the d.i.y project. A strip of pink fake fur also embellished the chair over the back and a congregation of small birds perched on the back of the seat, which lent a dreamlike quality to assemblage of objects.

Poo Zombies (2010) by Havelock Stevens, Dwyer and Cescon, records a search through the Sydney suburbs of Coogee and Kings Cross for the Pumpkin Buses, a special late night bus service. Accompanied by an instrumental drumming soundtrack, composed and played by Havelock Stevens, the video edits together footage of revelers crowded together on city footpaths, queuing for entry into nightclubs, splayed in the gutter or playing up to the camera. Whilst the voyeuristic pleasure in watching the inebriated holds its own repulsive attraction, Poo Zombies is also an exploration of the social fear of ephebiphobia, or the fear of youths. The current incarnation of urban fear, particularly in the form of roaming gangs of drunken youths has been fed by populist politicians and commercial television current affairs programs making grandiose statements based on documentation similar to the footage in Poo Zombies. Whilst there are a number of very serious social problems that have been collated under the umbrella of binge and underage drinking, there is little representation of these issues in the mainstream media. Instead, the coverage focuses on the
sensational, embellishing reality for the sake of entertainment and encouraging urban fears.

Positioned in front of the Poo Zombies projection, was a human-size cockroach complete with a pair of dirty white platform sandals. Lying face down, the insect looked as though it had crawled, intoxicated out of the video and passed out on the gallery floor.

As part of Alterbeast project, a CD catalogue has been produced, which features Havelock Stevens’ piece Nude Drumming, as well as a fold out double-sided poster. The extension of the project through the CD catalogue illustrates an intention to depart from the traditional exhibition structure and the accompanying ephemera. However, the presentation of Alterbeast at Gertrude Street adhered to a formal presentation, which in many ways undermined the experimental premise of the exhibition.

The premise of Alterbeast was not adequately acknowledged in the presentation of the works or alluded to in the exhibition ephemera available at the gallery (the exhibition press release did reference the collaborative element of the exhibition). The number of artists and the scale of the works created a full, almost claustrophobic exhibition, in which it was difficult to explore the themes of the individual artworks in relation to each other and the exhibition as a whole, outside of a literal, aesthetic comparison. However messy or unofficial this exchange was intended to be, the experience of viewing the exhibition, as the public presentation of this exploration, would have benefited from a more developed framework in which to approach the project.

Alterbeast was a promising exhibition in the wrong location. If the exhibition was presented in a larger space or a non-gallery space, this may have allowed the viewer to better reflect on the project’s investigation of the unknown and the frightening. Most gallery spaces encourage a traditional reading of an exhibition, including the idea that the works presented are complete and finished objects. For projects that are based on alternative models of presentation, or are initiated from experimental methods of development, such expectations are extremely problematic. The difficulty for such projects is creating situations facilitate a different viewing experience.

Megan Robson
Conclusion? 34 months of work give or take a week

It’s interesting to have the piece by Megan Robson, as an example of an individuals viewing experience. For it to be written down as a review hopefully gives the opportunity for feedback. The Melbourne version of Alterbeast I felt, was a little random, unplanned and out of control. While at the time we felt it was ok to go through with it in this manner. In hindsight it may have worked better if, the whole exhibition had been curated. As the collaborative group Alterbeast, we considered and still consider, the work of art as a complete organic whole consisting of an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations. I keep thinking of Ecco’s statement “Open because it is an ordered world based on ambiguity, both in the negative sense that the directional centers are missing and in a positive sense, because values and dogmas are constantly being placed in question

The “directional centre” could be considered the role of the curator. The curator becomes the axes point where one work is focused on and placed within proper distance in relation to another work. We could have moved I swapped my stool for a swivel chair closer to the
poo zombie video and animating that aspect with theatrical lighting. Gawronski’s Untitled chemical painting could have gone somewhere else; we could have left out the painting by Scott, leaving more space etc.

Instead, Alterbeast reared its collaborative head again as a three piece. This time for The Biennale of Sydney as part of the Superdelux series of entertainment nights at Artspace. Alterbeast used the new venue to wear our sculptures. A performance that consisted of Tina’s playing the drums to the Poo Zombie video, while the Zombie from I swapped my stool for a swivel chair was used as a costume, as was the cockroach which previously had lay dormant on the floor. While Tina drummed dressed as a Space Pixy (new for Tina) we slowly gravitated to the sound from different sides of the stage. Finally collapsing at the base of the drums. I think the movement and personifying of the sculptures helped bring a new aspect of three dimentiallity to the video and sound aspect of the work.

We filmed this performance with the idea of using it to further extend the work. Like a self-referential slasher horror film from the nineties. For example, Scream and I know What You Did Last Summer, have characters from the story refer to scenes from other movies like Halloween and Friday the 13th as informed suspicion to what might happen next. They predict the next stage of the story by making analogies of the scene they are in to actual scary movies. This is done with full acknowledgement that the audience has seen these movies and the experience and fear become shared, in a much more direct way. Making the horror scene common place and quite possibly one that the audience may also experience. The actors and the audience have seen this type of horror before.

As an artist, I believe it’s important to leave your options open. Following research is important, but also, you can’t help but absorb the surrounds of where you are in time and place. One has to be affected by the surrounding political climate and culture.
I think my open book is the inquiry into the way films have always reflected man’s deepest anxieties about himself. In a time where life or at least man’s awareness of it seems to be increasingly horrible. It is most understandable that elements from the horror of personality films (violence and insanity) are now fed into the mainstream. No longer does this genre of horror hold the same impact as it did in the times these films were released.

When Ecco uses Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück XI* sound piece as an example of “openness” it was to demonstrate it in a physical sense. A tangible manifestation of a creative work given over to somebody else to further interpret it. To leave a work unfinished I believe gives it a democratic edge, with out the preemptive mercantile approach or expectation.

“Every work of art is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible particular taste or perspective or personal performance”\(^40\)

So its Ecco, Mallarme and Romero that I have in mind when it comes to the next stage. Firstly there is Mallarme stating, “a book neither begins nor ends, it only pretends to do so” then it’s Ecco who says, “Acts of conscious freedom on the part of the artist as well as being placed in a network of limitless interrelations.” Regarding the production of art by artists of all disciplines, and the way works interject at any point to relate and hold some resonance to the intended. Finally it’s Romero asking the old question again “what is sane and what is insane”

Before coming to see *The Apartment, final girl theory* it might be helpful to watch some horror of Armageddon type films like *On the beach, The Day After, Zombie Flesh Eaters.* Mix that up with slasher horror, and if there is time something from the category known as the horror of personality type film. I am thinking mainly *Psychopath.*

---

Exhibitions

2007 Nightcrawlers & Shapeshifters, 100 days and nights in search of the Ramones.
Artspace Sydney NSW

2008 We Three Canberra Contemporary Art Centre ACT

2009 Last Dance The Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown Sydney NSW

2009 Camps and Outposts, an exercise in communication Hazelhurst Regional Gallery
Sutherland NSW

2010 A poster for Tom Verlaine Hell Gallery Melbourne VIC, Elastic Projects London UK

2010 Apartment no1 Death Be Kind Melbourne VIC

2010 Apartment no2 The Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown Sydney NSW

Collaborations

2010 Mark Foster, Hope The Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown Sydney NSW

2009 Quinto Sesto Ocular Lab Brunswick VIC

2010 Alterbeast Gertrude Street Centre For Contemporary Art, Fitzroy Vic, Superdelux
Artspace Sydney NSW
Bibliography

Claire Bishop Edited *Participation, Documents of Contemporary Art*. White Chapel Ventures LTD 2006


Miwon Kwon *One Place After another, Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* MIT Press 2002


Perec, Georges *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* Editions Galilee, 1974

Cantz, Hatje *Ugly* Catalogue of work by Ulaf Bruenning (Swiss) published in 2001


Runway is a contemporary art publication based in Sydney Aus.

Harris MD, Thomas A. *I'm ok- You're ok*. First published in 1973 reprinted by Galahad Books NY 2004

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* published by Seeke and Warburg London 1949

Ranciere, Jacques *The Emancipated Spectator* Verso 2009

CQ Amateur Radio communications & technology magazine March 2010