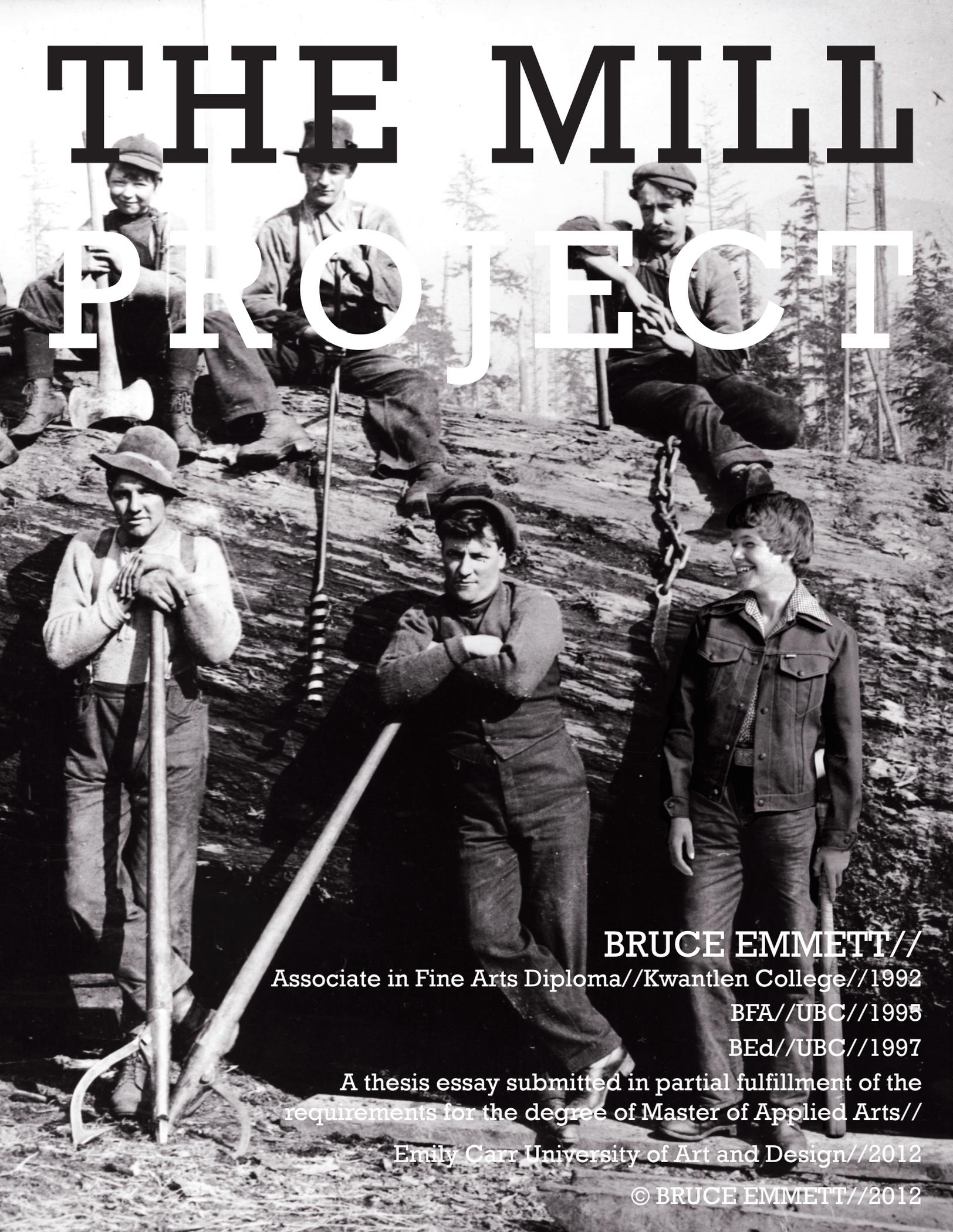


# THE MILL PROJECT



**BRUCE EMMETT//**

Associate in Fine Arts Diploma//Kwantlen College//1992

BFA//UBC//1995

BEd//UBC//1997

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# ABSTRACT//

I am exploring bricolage as the primary artistic gesture in the work that supports this thesis, focusing on the history of a single site in West Vancouver, where lies a remarkable subcultural artifact: the Inglewood ‘Mill’ Skatepark – the first skateboard park constructed in Canada in 1977, and subsequently buried in 1984. The skateboard subculture is layered with three other histories: the Shields Shingle Mill (1916-1926), West Vancouver Secondary School (1927-present), and my own lived experience as a suburban skateboarder. The approach of the project has been that of a pseudo-archaeological ‘excavation’, digging through the layers of the site’s historiography, engaging with questions around authorship and authenticity, historical accuracy and objectivity. Through the detournement of archival images (photomontage), an assemblage of site-related constructions, and a series of interventions, surveys, and excavations of the site, histories are subverted and conflated.

This project is an investigation of the appropriative strategy of bricolage and its ability – in both its material and intellectual capacity – to recompose dominant histories, ideologies, and mythologies. Bricolage is discussed in relation to appropriation, myth, and subcultures (specifically in the way bricolage is manifested in skateboard culture).

My investigation is supported, primarily, by the following writers and their theories: on the topic of bricolage, Claude Levi-Strauss and Dick Hebdige; on the topic of subcultures, Dick Hebdige and Iain Borden; on the topic of myth, Roland Barthes and Claude Levi-Strauss; and on the topic of appropriation, a whole host of writers and their discussions around postmodernism in the late seventies and eighties. Further examinations of these topics are found in the collage works of Martha Rosler, the pseudo-archaeological site interventions of Mark Dion, the ad-hoc constructions of collaborators Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser, and in the bricolage-installation, *Vancouver School*, by the collective Futura Bold.

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# LIST OF KEY TERMS//

## RE//

**Remake, recompose, reconstitute, repurpose, reclaim, reuse, restructure, reconstruct, reimagine, refashion, reappropriation, reproduction, rearrange, reject, revert**

## SUB//

**Subordinate, subculture, subsume, subhuman, subterranean, suburban, subdivision, subset, subsection, subversion**

# SECTION 1// ROLLING IN (INTRO)

## Warmup session//A quick roll around (Getting a feel for the terrain)

The Mill Project is a response to a site in West Vancouver and its three distinct layers of human history: industrial (the Shields Shingle Mill, 1916-1926), institutional (West Vancouver Secondary School, 1927-present), and subcultural (the Inglewood Mill Skatepark, 1977-1984). The project focuses primarily on the subcultural history and a most remarkable artifact: the first skateboard park in Canada, buried fully intact. The site has been approached as a space for research, exploration, and discovery, and has become the inspiration for an entire range of projects, small and large.

This project is a collage of sorts – a montage of histories, told through a series of artistic propositions, gestures, and actions, as I explore the appropriative strategy of bricolage and the recomposition of forms, both physical and historical. The approach to this project could be likened to an archaeological ‘excavation’ – (re)assembling fragments from nearly a century’s worth of everyday objects and experiences.

I should point out that work produced for the Mill Project, while inspired by the site, is not inextricably bound to it, or to its histories, and leaves a great deal of space for interpretation.

### Billy Tales

The writing has been structured around a series of short anecdotes, weaving a longtime friend’s stories into the fabric of this essay: tales of suburban skateboarding that parallel the academic and material discussion of the thesis project. Each of the ‘Billy Tales’ not only refers to conceptual and theoretical matters in the project, but also frames and is framed by the work of selected artists and the material production. His may be stories of suburban legend that contain a certain idealized mythology and an ‘anarchic discourse’<sup>1</sup>, but Billy’s tales are also part of my own real suburban skateboarding experience. There is, perhaps, an autoethnographic quality to this project, where my own subjectivity, while not fully foregrounded, has pointed a lens at a subcultural object, framing it in my actual experience. From time to time, throughout the essay, the lens moves to the background and zooms in, bringing my own story into focus.

*Dropping in* essentially lays out the methodology of the Mill Project, introducing core theoretical concepts. *Principles* is a discussion that begins with the hidden meaning of subcultural style, and the subcultural bricoleur’s challenge to notions of acceptable behaviour. This is related to the practice of collage, where issues of

authorship, and challenges to ideological myths are dissected through the detournement of appropriated images. *The ‘burbs taketh* primarily deals with material appropriation, both in the actions of skateboarders, and constructions in the realm of art production. *Archaeology* takes the conversation into the built environment and investigates ideas around spatial intervention, exploring more than just appropriated spaces, but appropriated methodologies. And finally in *Inverts*, an exploration of skate tactics and the subversion of objects for the purpose of skateboarding leads to a discussion around the semiotic-shifting strategies used by artists in their attempts to deconstruct how we apprehend everyday objects and experiences.

The stories create disruptions (fragments) within the thesis, yet simultaneously function to unify the writing. They are representative of bricolage and my rather ad-hoc, haphazard processes of writing and art production. I suppose in many ways I approach writing as a form of bricolage, pulling in appropriated stories, quotes, and theory, refashioning all to work within the frame of the conversation.

### Boys’ club

It needs to be acknowledged that there is a dominance of the male voice in this essay, from the Billy Tales, to the discussion of skateboarding, to my selection of readings and representative artists. At the centre of this conversation is skateboarding, where the physicality of the activity and its aggressive tendencies historically appeals to a greater number of males, which isn’t to say that females do not participate. It also happens that the majority of the theorists used to support the discussion topics tend to be men. And while much of the work that I reference is dominated by males, a great number of female artists have been very influential over the course of the MAA, specifically Germaine Koh, Martha Rosler, Folke Köbberling, Elspeth Pratt, and Marjetica Potrč.

### Snaking the bowl

The previous paragraph alludes to the fact that between the lines and in the white space in the margins, dwelling in and around my work, there is the presence of a whole host of artists. Worth mentioning for their appropriative collage works are Richard Hamilton and John Baldessari, and Dadaists Hannah Hoch and Raoul Hausmann. Also present are a number of artists who generate constructions utilizing appropriated materials and forms: Tony Cragg, Young & Giroux, Cedric Belfrage, Los Carpinteros, and designers Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglione. And last, artists who do site-work and social/spatial interventions, such as Allora & Calzadilla, Germaine Koh, Simon Starling, and Cyprien Gaillard reside here, too. In the efforts of keeping this paper to a manageable length, and to avoid generating a survey of artists in those three areas of art production, the selection has been pared down to Martha Rosler, Folke Köbberling & Martin Kaltwasser, Mark Dion, and the collective Futura Bold.

My work does not function to translate the theory, nor is there a 1:1 correlation between my work and the work of the selected artists. As the thesis rolls along, art and theory often weave between one another. Sometimes theory carves in the opposite direction, and occasionally they cut each other off, ending in a pile at the bottom of the bowl.

<sup>1</sup>This Hebdigian term reappears (and finds further context) in the section, *Principles*.



## Dropping in// Bricolage and skate theory

*Billy started skateboarding in 1984. This was the same year the District of West Vancouver buried the first concrete skatepark constructed in Canada under six feet of soil and rock. The next year the rest of us ditched our BMX bikes for skateboards, and it was clear from the start that skateboarding – not soccer or baseball or fishing or track and field – was to become the all-encompassing social and physical impulse of our teenage anti-conformist selves. What wasn't clear or known at the time was that this impulse was going to remain with us for the next 25-plus years, with no end in sight.*

### Making do: The Mill Project's bricolagic

The world is a pretty interesting place, especially for a skateboarder. Skateboarders have a unique way of interpreting the world: they are appropriators and 'users of forms'. From the instant some kid bolted roller skate wheels to a two-by-four, to the time that the Dogtown skaters decided to roll into an empty swimming pool, and from the moment that Mark Gonzales slid his board down a handrail – skateboarders have been users of forms. Whether intervening in the built environment, or constructing environments of their own, skateboarders have been appropriating and subverting materials and objects since the first moment a skateboard hit the streets.

It is clear that growing up as a suburban skateboarder has interfered with the way I see the world: the built environment viewed as a playground, the function of everyday objects and spaces subverted. This attitude has managed to extend into my art practice, and can be seen in my appropriative tendencies and in my – at times – irreverent use of forms. I limit myself to working with existing material that I then recompose, shifting its signification so that the material takes on new meaning. I am exploring this strategy as a form of bricolage.<sup>2</sup> Bricolage, for the purpose of this essay, refers to the appropriative practice where one makes use of available material (recycled, reused, repurposed) and, through a process of collage, montage, assemblage, the material is recomposed, offering new meanings and new interpretations.

<sup>2</sup>Wikipedia offers a useful definition of bricolage, stating that the term originates from the French 'bricoler' (translation: 'to tinker') and is associated with the contemporary term 'DIY', or 'Do-It-Yourself'.

Michel de Certeau refers to bricolage as "a poetic way of making do" (Practice, xv). For some of the collage work, I 'make do' with found materials – granted, I source out the materials, but they are not generated by me. In the case of the furniture constructions, on the other hand, I 'make do' with truly found (discovered) materials, which I then refashion into new objects.

This 'material bricolage' is one aspect of the notion of 'using forms'. However, bricolage is more than the recombination of found or available materials. Bricolage, as explored in this project, has an anthropological association that is in alignment with the theories of Claude Levi-Strauss as discussed in *The Savage Mind*, and with Dick Hebdige's discussion of bricolage as it applies to subcultures in 1979's *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*. It is this anthropological relation that allows bricolage to supersede its simple function as a strategy for the recombination of physical material, and to emerge with fuller significance as a strategy for the recombination of the Mill site's layers of history.

In "The Science of the Concrete", the first chapter of *The Savage Mind*, Levi-Strauss discusses mythical thought, claiming that it is "...a kind of intellectual bricolage..." (17). Levi-Strauss's discussion explores the relationship between bricolage's material capacity and its analogous intellectual capacity for the fabrication of myth. Material bricolage involves the restructuring of existing materials, and its analogue, the intellectual form of bricolage involves the restructuring of existing (his)stories, reshuffled into a multitude of combinations and permutations, which we may call 'myth'.

Referencing Levi-Strauss's *Savage Mind*, Dick Hebdige discusses how myths "are capable of infinite extension because basic elements can be used in a variety of improvised combinations to generate new meanings within them" (Subculture, 103). And here we must attend to Roland Barthes definition of myth which he introduces in 1957's *Mythologies*, where he speaks of myth essentially as ideology: the hidden mechanisms that operate in and through everyday life, perceived as the natural workings of the world. Hebdige notes that "Barthes found an 'anonymous ideology' penetrating every possible level of social life, inscribed in the most mundane of rituals, framing the most casual social encounters" (Subculture, 11). This, in turn, leads to Hebdige's application of bricolage to youth subcultures: "The theft and transformation of styles can be viewed as acts of bricolage," states Hebdige in *Subculture* (104). Hebdige sees bricolage as a central subversive action of subcultures; the poaching, refashioning, and recombination of existing styles generates a distinctive identity that positions the subculture in opposition to mainstream culture and dominant ideologies. The appropriation of everyday forms is key in this essay's discussion of the distinctive identity and appropriative activities found in skate culture. Bricolage, vis-à-vis Levi-Strauss and Hebdige, provides me with a useful methodological tool for the excavation of the Mill site's layered, human history.



Fig 1. Rejected then reclaimed school furniture materials.

<sup>3</sup> A recent publication featuring K&K's work is entitled: *Hold It!: The Art & Architecture of Public-space-bricolage-resistance-resources-aesthetics of Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser*. The artists, during a talk at the Olympic Village site in 2010, also referred to their process as 'bricolage'.

### Mashup, detournement, and DIY

Bricolage is one of a number of terms bouncing around the appropriative sphere: detournement, culture jamming, remix, mashup, DIY, detourage. Nicolas Bourriaud describes Mike Kelley's strategy of 'detourage' (a term that appears to be a hybrid of 'bricolage' and 'detournement') in relation to "the way our culture operates by transplanting, grafting, and decontextualizing things" (Deejaying, 159). Both bricolage and detourage, nomenclature aside, are clearly appropriative strategies, but both go far beyond the mere act of appropriation, or borrowing, and involve the reinterpretation and restructuring of material, in order to alter existing meaning. However, bricolage is my preferred term, in large part due to its connection to the aforementioned theoretical players in this project, but also because of its contemporary use by German artists, Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser<sup>3</sup>. While other artists referenced in this paper have not historically been identified as bricoleurs, some of their actions do situate them within the boundaries of the definition.

In Dick Hebdige's essay, "Notes On Pop", he speaks of "the art of musical pastiche, word salad, aural cut-ups, the art of sound quotation: the new musical genres, rap, dub, electronic, and 'constructed sound'" (85). It is fitting here to mention mashup, as one of bricolage's close relatives, likely familiar to us in its musical context in the form of remix (but can be extended in its use to other areas of production), where contradictory musical styles are overlaid (e.g., Celine Dion and GWAR) yet retain their individual musical qualities. We're essentially dealing with nomenclature here, as the aforementioned terms are part of a larger continuum, with roots in appropriative strategies. And although the terms may change over time, I would argue that the central motivation for this sort of appropriative, rearranging activity has not: new possibilities emerge from the restructuring of the "remains and debris of events, (the) fossilized evidence of an individual or society" (Levi-Strauss, 22). That being said – and in the spirit of appropriation – I am re-engaging a somewhat antiquated term, 33 years past its sell-by date: *bricolage*.

### The suburbs: What lies beneath

This project asks what happens to the history of a place, to its dominant stories, ideologies, and mythologies when they are appropriated, subverted, reinterpreted, and superimposed with new ones. The project has involved a series of appropriations, the greatest of which being the symbolic appropriation of the 'Mill site', a rather innocuous space in West Vancouver, where lies a subterranean subcultural treasure: the first skateboard park constructed in Canada, built in 1977, buried in 1984. The skatepark opened in 1977 to throngs of ecstatic youth, and suffered its demise only seven years later, during one of the lowest points in skateboarding's cyclical waves of popularity, the park a relic in its own time, a site for rowdy weekend bonfires, nary a skateboard to be seen. The skateboard park lies physically six feet under, sandwiched between the site's two other histories: the Shields Shingle Mill which operated nearly 100 years ago, and West Vancouver Secondary School that still exists today. There is also a fourth history that informs the project, that of my own lived experience as a suburban skateboarder. I should be careful to point out that all this attention to the multiple layers of history is not to say that this is some kind of history project. Rather I am interrogating historical 'truth' and, in the same stroke, offering a reinterpretation of the site's history.



Fig 2. Inglewood "Mill" Skatepark, opening day, 1977.  
Film still from *Skateboard Sculpture*.  
Courtesy of West Vancouver Archives.  
Used by permission.

Beyond the historical material, I choose to appropriate the methodologies of areas of study outside the realm of art, art history, and art theory, dabbling in anthropology, archaeology, and geophysics, tinkering in areas in which I should have no business tinkering, yet are within the purview of the contemporary artist. Here, as part of my appropriation game, I have enlisted experts in other fields, borrowing their knowledge in order to facilitate a richer experience and interpretation of the site. This is where I may align myself with artist Mark Dion and his interest, methodologically, in the amateur. He writes: "One of the things about the amateur is that, even though something may not be new to science (...), it's new to them. They're able to experience the enthusiasm and excitement about discovery, which really drives scientific enquiry and artistic passion, as well" (Dion, art:21).

Further to the notion of the 'amateur', Martha Rosler's videos resonate here: the casual gesture, the lack of preciousness – these sensibilities are echoed in my own video, *Fluge*, shot entirely on an iPhone. I have a strong affinity with Rosler's statement, "(V)ideo is not a strategy, it is merely a mode of access", which for me speaks to broader concepts of artistic activity and production embraced in *The Mill Project* (Rosler, *To argue for...*, 368).

Martha Rosler and Mark Dion freely traverse areas of knowledge, and move between mediums without being shackled to notions of 'virtuosity' or 'expertise'. It is this freedom to discover and explore that is so attractive to that 'tinkerer', the bricoleur. The seemingly endless mixing of forms, of methodologies – the endless combinations and permutations offer a virtually never-ending supply of material with which to work.

### Pushing on: Three poached quotes

Before we move into the body of the essay, I would like to drop three quotes that resonate with the project and explain some of the choices I have made regarding the work produced. The three quotes cover a great deal of territory. The first is from Nicolas Bourriaud, and certainly reflects my fascination with the anti-author, the amateur, the user of forms, the bricoleur. The Stan Douglas quote hasn't left me alone since summer 2011. I'm very intrigued by his statement, but I have yet to apprehend the fullness of its meaning. Rosalind Krauss's quote suggests an art philosophy that I fully embrace, particularly because I don't feel my work operates in a space that provides answers, or a message to the world. All three reflect a certain kind of "anti-art" aesthetic, and an interest in the proposition over the declaration.

#### 1 Nicolas Bourriaud – "Deejaying and Contemporary Art" (2002)

In our daily lives, the gap that separates production and consumption narrows each day. We can produce a musical work without playing a single note of music by making use of existing records. (T)he consumer adapts the products he or she buys to his or her personality or needs. Soon Do-It-Yourself will reach every layer of cultural production. (158)

#### 2 Stan Douglas during a Masters class critique at Emily Carr (2011)

The work needs to be at risk of not being art.

#### 3 Rosalind Krauss – Passages in Modern Sculpture (1977)

The readymades became in that way part of Duchamp's project to make certain kinds of strategic moves – moves that would raise questions about what exactly is the nature of the work in the term "work of art". Clearly, one answer suggested by the readymades is that a work might not be a physical object but rather a question, and that the making of art might, therefore, be reconsidered as taking a perfectly legitimate form in the speculative act of posing questions (72-73).

## SECTION 2// MYTHOLOGIES OF THE SUBURBS

### Principles//Skater-punk ideology and some thoughts on authorship

*In 1984, Billy was an eleven-year-old punk rock skater – a little guy, and the only kid in elementary school sporting spiky hair, an earring, and a graf-fitted jean jacket covered in punk band names and skate logos. By 1987 Billy was deep in the scene, with all the physical and emotional attributes that makes punk punk.*

*Billy and friends were skating at lunch hour on the road in front of their junior high school, and although they were off school property, they were still brought into the office. Once there, Billy was told to remove his hat, and to hand over his skateboard. He refused. The principal snatched his board from him and threw it into the corner. Billy responded by clearing everything off the principal's desk with one sweep of his arms. The principal stood incredulous and fuming. "If you're not going to respect my stuff, I'm not going to respect yours," Billy stated flatly. And nothing more was said about that.*



#### Subtext

The skateboarder is a subcultural bricoleur par excellence. The skateboard, the baseball cap, the graffitied jacket are all items that, as Dick Hebdige says, "carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination" (Subculture, 18). The skateboarder's aesthetic in many ways aligns with that of the punk generation, a key topic in Hebdige's seminal book *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1979) where, using the structuralist theories of Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and others, Hebdige discusses subcultures in terms of their unique sign-systems. Here he introduces the concept of the subcultural bricoleur – the term 'bricolage' poached from Levi-Strauss. Again, we're speaking here of bricolage as an appropriation of existing forms, the punker using "(o)bjects borrowed from the most sordid of contexts: lavatory chains draped across chests, safety pins worn as gruesome ornaments through the cheek, hair obviously dyed, shirts covered in graffiti" (Hebdige, Subculture, 107). The punk movement arose at the same time as the second wave of skateboarding in the seventies, and to this day informs much of contemporary skateboarding's aesthetic, as skateboarders continue to question, reject and redefine cultural values and norms. In some ways the act of skateboarding is a catalyst for other activities. As Anthony Kiendl<sup>4</sup> puts it, skateboarding is "a way of life, a culture with its own dress, language, music, and beliefs (...) that originated in the suburbs within a culture of conformity and boredom" (26).

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Kiendl is currently the director of Winnipeg's Plug-In Institute of Contemporary Art, and in 2003 he curated an exhibit at Regina's Dunlop Art Gallery, *Godzilla vs Skateboarders: Skateboarding as a Critique of Social Spaces*.



**Fig 3. Bruce Emmett**  
*Conveyor* (from the series *Millers*), 2011-2012  
 Digital photomontage  
 439 x 550 pixels (print dimensions variable)  
 Used by permission of the artist.

Skateboarding, as a subculture, is a conflation of jock athleticism and something else: a “punk” aesthetic – a subversive, cool, countercultural agenda that undermines the ‘healthy sports’ mentality while still appearing to participate in it. The skateboarder engages in an activity that calls into question dominant ideologies or cultural myths: what is an ‘athlete’, and what is the nature of ‘sport’? (And: What is the function of the built environment? This will be discussed in greater measure later in this paper.) Dominant ideologies become dismantled through the appropriation of their own forms.

### Subversive action

Throughout this project there is an underlying challenge to the historical reality of the Mill site and to the embedded ideologies that permit some historical moments to be revived, while others to be buried. I share with Hebdige an interest in the exploration of subcultural tendencies, and the ways that subcultures challenge the dominant culture/ideology as “incompatible pairings are juxtaposed in a subversive gesture” (Subculture, 104). This “anarchic discourse” and the punk generation’s refusal to participate in society as ‘respectable citizens’ is in many ways aligned with the Dadaists, and their refusal to take on the role of ‘traditional artists’ (Hebdige, Subculture, 105). As Raoul Haussmann states in Hans Richter’s book *Dada: Art and Anti-art*, “Photomontage embodied our refusal to play the part of the artist. We regarded ourselves as engineers, and our work as construction: we assembled (French – monter) our work, like a fitter” (118). Martha Rosler, too, refused to play the part of the artist and positioned herself in a similar non-art stance, as indicated in a text from 1996: “I was making work both at the margins of a community and from within it. I was making photo montages that I didn’t call ‘art,’ though I didn’t doubt they were, and I had no intention of placing them in the art world – that was the point” (Rosler, Statement, 487).

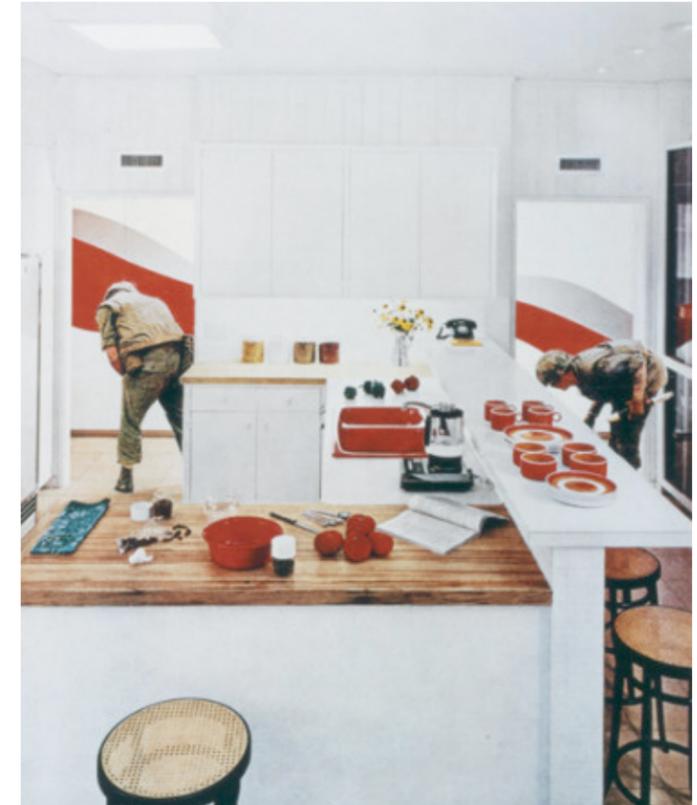
In Rosler’s series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (Fig 4), a jarring photographic reality is generated through the combination of distant, or conflicting realities – “productive fictions” as Rosler calls them, where “two ore more discourses collide” (Rosler, Artist’s text, 96). Massachusetts-based curator and professor Susan Stoops writes, “Rosler’s visual collisions of domestic life and the war take the form of a consumer product paired with a war-zone setting, which challenges us to consider the economic and social

connections between disparate realities...” (61). Rosler revisited this series in 2004, almost 40 years later, and in all that time her work remains fresh, her political and artistic position solid. Collage still holds a great deal of currency in contemporary art practice. Rosler’s recent iterations of *Bringing the War Home*, and her continued use of collage imagery supports this. Collage’s currency is further evidenced by a massive recent exhibit, *Cut and Paste*, at Vancouver’s Equinox Project Space, that filled the warehouse-sized gallery with modern and contemporary collage work by Canadian artists.<sup>5</sup>

The present vitality of collage and photomontage can be understood particularly in light of the availability of visual images today, and in the way images can be collected, shared, and manipulated through image-based communication technologies. Massimiliano Gioni writes in 2007, “...collage has gathered a new momentum in this first decade of the century. (...) (O)nce again we are experiencing an explosion of images – more invasive and volatile than ever – that have completely colonized and shaped our social space” (12). Collage (and photomontage) and its unique method of visual inquiry (into culture, consumption, appropriation, authorship, image reproduction and accessibility) and its inclusion in the critical conversation of art production has not abated – there has only been an acceleration, a greater proliferation, and a heightened interest in all that stuff that has made collage so compelling over the past century.

I agree with Calvin Tomkins that collage is the “most seductive of 20th century techniques (which) enabled the artist to incorporate reality without imitating it” (87). It is this act of ‘incorporation without imitation’ that shifts, subverts, and, in turn, makes meaning. In Benjamin Buchloh’s essay “Allegorical Procedures”, Buchloh quotes Martha Rosler who states: “I think it’s even more valid to talk about contradiction than about collage (...) I like to point to situations in which we can see the myths of ideology contradicted by our actual experience” (Buchloh, 45).

We recognize in skate subculture a sort of collage or montage of cultural realities – to borrow Hebdige’s words, a “juxtaposition of two or more distant realities” (Subculture, 105). Through a juxtaposition of realities and the subversion of familiar forms, a second meaning emerges, one that is defined by and may, in turn, define the user (and, in this case, a subculture). It is in this spirit that some of my own work has emerged, speaking specifically of the photomontage series *Millers*, a series of cheeky historical reimaginations of the Mill site, combining archival images of the BC logging industry with images pulled from 1970s-era Sears catalogues and skateboard publications (Fig 3). Martha Rosler wished to create spaces that are “spatially plausible”, where she “suspends the perceiver between the possible and the impossible or the unlikely” (Artist’s Text, 96). In a similar fashion, *Millers* creates odd scenarios that play with notions of ‘reality’ or historical ‘truth’, as 1970s youth naughtily infiltrate the lexicon of archival images and casually disrupt our British Columbian heritage. There is a directness to the communicative quality of a photograph, an immediacy to the gesture of collage and photomontage, and a thrill that arises from the poaching and altering of found images. These irreverent detournements question authorship, historical accuracy, and authenticity – a whimsical poke at dominant cultural ideologies.



**Fig 4. Martha Rosler**  
*Red Stripe Kitchen* (from the series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*), 1967–72  
 Photomontage  
 23.25 x 17.75 in.  
 Courtesy of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Used by permission.  
 © Martha Rosler.

<sup>5</sup> Equinox Gallery’s Project Space recently held the exhibit *Cut and Paste* in June and July of 2012, a comprehensive collection of Canadian collage.



## The ‘burbs giveth, and the ‘burbs taketh away// (Or: What’s appropriate in appropriation?)

*One year, Billy built a massive skatepark complex comprising a dozen interconnecting ramps that spread out from his carport, onto the lawn, and all the way to the street. The wood for the project came from a number of sources, including a new subdivision development around the corner from Billy’s house. Once the material was recomposed into skate structures, the scavengers figured that their tracks would be covered. But the same week, when the contractor walked around the block and recognized the stamped markings on his plywood, he confronted Billy and friends, who adamantly denied involvement in any sort of pilfering. So the next weekend, while Billy and his family were away camping, the contractor came with two flat-bed trucks – one equipped with a crane – loaded the ramps intact, and carted them away, while the neighbours looked on with mild interest.*

### Material poetry

For a skateboarder, appropriation, construction, and transformation of spaces for skateboarding are intrinsic to his practice. As Levi-Strauss states: “The bricoleur addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours, that is, only a sub-set of the culture” (Savage Mind, 17). The ongoing search for skateable environments – whether constructed or found – drives the skateboarder.

Appropriation’s long story made short: Duchamp set the stage, and since then we have been acting it out. Without going into a detailed account of the history of appropriation, I think it is safe to say that the forms of art making over the past hundred years or so reveals appropriation as a (*the?*) dominant mode of art production. From Duchamp and the readymade to Picasso and collage, from Pop to the Pictures Generation, to the contemporary art scene, the appropriation of forms is pervasive. Bricolage is, at its core, an appropriative practice, but I argue that bricolage goes further than mere appropriation. Bricolage also goes beyond the simple gesture of borrowing and de/recontextualizing cultural objects, beyond a restructuring of materials or a recombination of forms. In the context of this project, bricolage involves a gathering of historical fragments and traces of human moments, recomposed in an attempt to make new (or poetic) associations between a multiplicity of human experiences.



Fig 5. Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser  
*The Games are Open*, 2010  
Wheatboard panels, screws, earth, variety of plantings.  
Approx. 240 x 240 x 540 in.  
Courtesy of Other Sights. Photo by SITE Photography.  
Used by permission. © Other Sights for Artists.

As mentioned earlier, de Certeau called bricolage a “poetic way of making do”, and the following quote from Levi-Strauss may complete that thought: “Further, the bricoleur derives his poetry from the fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution: he ‘speaks’ not only with things, but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities.” (Savage Mind, 14). There’s hardly a thing more satisfying than discovering a solution using only the materials at hand – it is in that moment when ingenuity meets genius, where the bricoleur meets eye-to-eye with the engineer.

### Fellow bricoleurs

In 2010, the artists Folke Köbberling and Martin Kaltwasser were in Vancouver, in the process of constructing *The Games Are Open*: a massive structure, built from wheatboard, recomposed into a bulldozer (Fig 5). The hundreds upon hundreds of sheets of wheatboard were sourced from the Olympic Village apartment development, where they were used to cover and protect expensive appliances and kitchen furnishings while the athletes were occupying the Village.

I was fortunate to meet the artists in July of 2010 during the Low-Residency MAA summer intensive at Emily Carr University, where students had an opportunity to see the artists on-site and to discuss their project. Köbberling and Kaltwasser refer to their process as bricolage, where “Function Follows Form” – the artists’ (in)version of Mies van der Rohe’s famous saying. They source out unused, unwanted materials, allowing the materials’ form to direct their work. In a short essay from the

book *Hold It!*, Sonke Gau and Katharina Schlieben discuss the artists' material bricolage, stating, "(T)he artists might be described as transformers, too, who produce something of value from ostensibly worthless base material (...), a demonstration of the useful application of seemingly useless matter" (228-229). Levi-Strauss discusses this further when he writes, "The bricoleur does not subordinate (tasks) to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand'" (Savage Mind, 11). In like fashion, my large construction pieces, *Untitled (form)* (Fig 6) and *Untitled (as is)* (Fig 14), are made from cast-off school furniture, where I have restricted myself to working within the limits of the material: Formica-covered plywood tables and cabinets, precut and sized.

In the ordering and reordering of intellectual material, I continue to explore appropriative strategies, borrowing forms that reference the Mill site (as Köbberling and Kaltwasser did with the bulldozer model for *Games*, referencing the massive urban development in Vancouver, particularly in the False Creek area). For *Untitled (as is)* I have reconstituted some of the historical material in the form of a log flume, and in the case of *Untitled (form)*, the basic shape comes from industrial processes, referencing the wooden forms constructed prior to pouring concrete. The objects have further connotations (picnic table, skate ramp), offering an open space for interpretation.

**Fig 6. Bruce Emmett**  
*Untitled (form)*, 2012  
Furniture materials  
91.75 x 58 x 41 in.  
Used by permission of the artist.



## Making spaces// An archaeology of the suburbs

*Before anyone had a driver's license, Billy and friends would skate to the Mall. They would follow a route, hitting skate spots along the way: the Kennedy Benches, the Shoppers Drug Mart Steps, the Panagopoulos Banks, the Owl and the Engineer Underground, the Whaler Ledge, the Rogers Video Bump, Stairs, and Waxed Curb, and the Arcade Wheelchair Ramp. They would then cut through the subdivisions, before arriving at the Mall and its concrete sprawl of curbs, rails, ledges, and stairways. It was a 20-block skate, and they would often make the trek twice a day.*



### Freed from enclavement

The desire to break free of boundaries is a most overwhelming impulse, possibly none more so than for the suburban skateboarder, whose performative tactics naturally lead to the streets, to movement and traversing spaces. I use the term 'space' rather than 'place' here, deferring to Michel de Certeau, who states that "space is a practiced place" (117). Skateboarders produce a different reality: through their practice, they imagine and invent their world. Cultural theorist Terence Hawkes states in his 1977 book, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, "(W)e encode our experience of the world in order that we may experience it... We thus invent the world we inhabit" (107). It is this system of encoding that allows a form of mapping of the streets and suburban space to emerge, leading to a system of classification, based on a relationship to objects and spaces appropriated for the act of skateboarding.

### Bricollections: A spatial inventory

The skateboarder's spatial inventory is a collection of signs with unique second-order signification; it is a gathering of a repertory of skateable structures: the rail, the ledge, the curb. My own collection of signs is for the purpose of creating propositional spaces, fabricated from a bricolage of observations and images. In my 'suburban action' pieces (*Inglewood, Survey, Penetration, and Fluge* - Figs 17-21), one may infer an interest in mapping or charting places. This body of work hints at plans for constructions, or gestures towards archaeological or architectural propositions. Images of subdivisions pulled from Google Earth, digital images of the buried skatepark produced using ground penetrating radar, road markings photographed in passing – mine is not a physical collection, but there is a collector's mentality present here, with rather improvisational strategies for classifying and understanding.

The system of classification is far from prescriptive, leaving plenty of opportunity for interpretation, a sentiment shared with artist Mark Dion. “By refusing to follow a more orthodox, historical approach to categorization, Dion encourages viewers to create their own imaginative and poetic associations” (Web - Tate, Displaying). In an article from a 2009 issue of *Modern Painters*, writer Jeffrey Kastner refers to Dion as “the contemporary artworld’s preeminent collector and exhibitor of found objects” (29). In his *Tate Thames Dig* (1999) Dion utilizes systems of categorization, poaching the tools and vocabulary of archaeology, blurring the line between that specialized field and an artistic practice. The *Thames Dig* involved an archaeological team of volunteers who collected and categorized all manner of artifacts along both banks of the Thames in front of both Tates Britain and Modern, the artifacts later presented in a large mahogany cabinet for display (Figs 7 and 8). Here again is a methodological overlap, seen with my own work in some capacity in *Survey* (Fig 21), but made even clearer in another intervention of the Mill site, *Penetration* (Fig 17, 18), where I worked with a geophysics company, using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to scan the subterranean artifact.

In *Penetration*, I make use of tools and methods outside of my own area of expertise (expert: a term I find problematic at the best of times) and engage in a collaborative effort in an intervention of the Mill site. And, like Dion’s artistic actions, I present the resulting ephemera as artwork in a gallery space. Dion’s intent of exploring “London’s rich cultural and industrial history through its material remains” is echoed in the Mill Project, specifically in the appropriation of an archaeological methodology as part of a discursive art practice, and the collaboration with specialists in a field outside of standard art production (Tate, Williams). The appropriation of forms and language outside of the ‘usual’ modes of art production is the way of the bricoleur, that user of forms.

**Fig 7. Mark Dion**  
*Tate Thames Dig*, 1999  
 Mixed media  
 104.7 x 145.7 x 49.6 in.  
 Courtesy Tate Images.

**Fig 8. (Right) Mark Dion**  
*Tate Thames Dig – Dig Team on the Shore*, 1999  
 Mixed media  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery,  
 New York.



## Inverts and the ups and downs of handrails//

*Billy was the first to learn inverts. Which implies the rest of us learned them, which we didn't. While we were still figuring out how to stand up on a skateboard, Billy was planting his hand, and turning it all upside-down. He was also the first to do a handrail at the little Credit Union four-set near the Mall. Again, while the rest of us were using the handrail to clamber up the stairs, Billy was using it to slide back down.*

### Obstacles

Skateboarding has a set of unwritten (sub)cultural codes, dictating taste, style, fashion, and that ever-elusive creature: “cool”. But, unlike basketball or golf, there is no official rulebook. Nobody dictates the number of times you can push before you reach an obstacle, or how long a grind is allowed to be, or how many ollies you are permitted to do before you have to pick up your skateboard and go home. Nor is there a list of the appropriate set of objects that may be considered as obstacles for skateboarding. Certainly, most objects found in the built environment were not designed with skateboarding in mind (unless we’re talking about objects found in a skatepark, which, at this time, we are not). A handrail has a simple enough function: it assists a person in their ascent or descent of stairs and inclined walkways. The skateboarder, in his subversion and inversion of the function of the handrail as an obstacle for sliding or grinding, resists the culturally constructed (unwritten) rulebook of assigned, or denoted meanings. Skateboarding is based on a system of created connotations: skateboarders have been making and breaking meaning from the start.

Skateboarders assign new meaning to everyday objects, interpreting and subverting the (sub) urban environment. The skateboarder – that subcultural bricoleur – appropriates then shifts the prior dominant semiotic assemblage. That is the power of the move – it disrupts the known, understood and culturally acceptable use and function of things. Through their detournements, skateboarders disrupt culturally constructed norms, defying the dominant culture through their disruption of its codes. Like the consumer in Nicholas Bourriaud’s essay “Deejaying and Contemporary Art”, the skateboarder is “an intelligent and potentially subversive consumer: the user of forms” (158). The appropriation of the handrail is a gesture on the part of skateboarders to not only challenge the tacit ideology of the built environment, but is also an opportunity to transform the world according to a new set of codes. In Robert S. Nelson’s essay “Appropriation”, he uses Pierre Bourdieu’s term, “symbolic capital”, speaking of an individual’s ability, through appropriation, to “transform ordinary objects ... (as) the quality or significance of the object transfers to the person, completing the appropriative loop” (Nelson, 167). Skateboarders’ activities in the built environment may, too, be gaining for them what might be referred to as symbolic (sub)cultural capital.





**Fig 9. 'Skatestopper' interventions**  
Downtown Vancouver.  
Photos: Bruce Emmett.  
Used by permission.

### The mythology of skatestoppers: A science of concrete

Within the skateboarding milieu, the handrail, bench, and ledge have been appropriated and naturalized as objects for skateboarding. However, the subversion of these objects – now recognized by the dominant group – has undergone a second silent subversion, where a reappropriation has occurred, as city planners have initiated architectural interventions ('skatestopping' or 'capping') to control the actions of skateboarders (Fig 9). This second (re)appropriation works "silently (...) as if it were natural and wholly benign" (Nelson, 164) as those with the 'real' cultural capital have reappropriated the sites of the first subcultural appropriation. A quote from Roland Barthes may be applicable here: "A conjuring trick has taken place, it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history" (Barthes, 142). The controlling interventions have become naturalized, a system of control, ideology silently shifting things back into their 'rightful' place, their 'true' function re-revealed.

### 90° turns

When Marcel Duchamp made the small gesture of placing a urinal on a plinth, shifting it 90 degrees off its regular position, "the work was no longer a common object, because it had been transposed." Duchamp's move "stood for a transformation that then must be read on a metaphysical level. Folded into that act of inversion is (...) an act in which the object has been transplanted from the ordinary world into the realm of art" (Krauss, *Modern Sculpture*, 77).

In 2006 five Canadian artists, Douglas Coupland, Graham Gilmore, Angela Grossmann, Attila Richard Lukacs and Derek Root (the collective known as Futura Bold), undertook the task of creating a massive installation piece, *Vancouver School*, where they filled the large Artists for Kids Gallery (itself a former school gymnasium) using materials from a decommissioned school in North Vancouver (Fig 10). As the viewer entered *Vancouver School* (the title an irreverent riff on the Vancouver School of photoconceptual art), he or she was welcomed with a stick of Dubble Bubble bubblegum, its purpose revealed as you walked into the gallery, confronted with a floor-to-ceiling stack of desks covered in stringy strands of chewed gum (placed unceremoniously as the gallery-goers exited the show). Moving further into the space, the viewer entered into in a school environment turned very squirrely indeed: gymnasium floorboards curving up the wall like a skateboard quarterpipe, a balance beam that appeared to have been chewed in the centre by an angry beaver, a wall of toilets (merci M. Duchamp), a satellite made from sports trophies, a ghostly hand writing notes at an old tub desk, and a three-foot-long 'breathing' dust-sausage made from filth found beneath the floorboards, an airbag inserted within.



**Fig 10. Images from Vancouver School installation, 2006**  
Artists for Kids Gallery, North Vancouver.  
Photos: Bruce Emmett.  
Used by permission of the Artists for Kids Trust.

Through a host of playful and irreverent (mis)appropriations, the artists make a whimsical challenge to cherished Canadian cultural property and venerated institutions. Viewing it through the eyes of Hebdige and Levi-Strauss, the semiotic salad served by the five artists can be understood as bricolage, with the selection and recomposition of materials in this 'mutant reimagining' of school's glory days. The discursivity of the practices are held together by the central concept and the action of bricolage: appropriation of existing materials in the creation of a revised and reinvested history, an erasure of memories, with a sort of palimpsest, or residue of memory remaining. Old stories transformed into new ones – Levi-Strauss's myth enacted. In "Allegorical Procedures", in reference to Sherrie Levine's appropriations of photographs, Benjamin Buchloh states that she is "confiscat(ing) historical objects, canceling (...) their historical function" (Buchloh, 42-3). Derek Root says something similar in an interview with Vancouver art critic Robin Laurence: "We worked with the idea of reconfiguring objects to evoke a new connotation, or to alter the meaning" (Laurence). These are both statements that I echo in the Mill Project, as I am for the most part working out ways of inverting meaning, or questioning how we might apprehend experience, history, the known world, the world of images. Like the handrail in the hands (or under the feet) of the subcultural user of forms, my work is inverted in its relationship to the viewer, where meaning is subverted through a distortion of the semiotic assemblage.





Fig 11. *Untitled* (from the series, *Catalogue*). Selected page, shown front and back) 2011-2012  
Collage on vellum  
11 x 8.5 in.  
Used by permission of the artist.

## SECTION 3// MILLWORKS (BRICOLAGE)

*“What does it mean to adopt, take over, colonize, emulate, repeat, work within, work against, reimagine, retemporalize, reject, edit and recompose the spaces of the city and its architecture?” – Iain Borden<sup>6</sup>*

The artworks presented in this project reflect a strong affinity for a kind of art/design aesthetic that is a bit aloof, or removed, and implicit rather than explicit in its communication. The works reflect an alignment with a non-declarative aesthetic, where questions are formed, propositions posed. We may recall an earlier quote from Martha Rosler where she states, “I was making photo montages that I didn’t call ‘art,’ though I didn’t doubt they were...” (Rosler, Statement, 487). I’m more interested in hinting at something: connotation over denotation. It is the peripheral action, the story behind the scenes that captivates me, rather than dealing with the work face-on. I like the idea of talking (and writing) beside the work, to contextualize rather than proselytize. To quote Trinh T. Minh-ha: “I do not intend to speak about – just speak nearby” (Minh-ha, *Reassemblage*).

<sup>6</sup> Iain Borden’s academic text, *Skateboarding, space and the city: architecture and the body* (2001) examines the “spatial tactics of appropriation and colonization” and the relationship that skateboarders have with both the found and built environment (2).

## SUBCULTURE: MEANING AND STYLE// Catalogue, Simpsons-Searies, Millers

### Memory Mine

Along with the buried skatepark itself, another object has become a site for excavation: a 1978 Sears Catalogue – a thrift store find, an artifact, and a source for another layer of the Mill story, this chapter told through objects of consumption. Every now and again my own story has inserted itself into the Mill Project, where I have made a more direct and subjective statement with the work, weaving direct experience into the fabric of this tale. The *Catalogue* series (Fig 11) contains fragments of my own story, of an upbringing in the late seventies, where I have generated a personal inventory of consumption, a collection of objects that are an assemblage of mined memories. In *Simpsons-Searies* (Fig 12), an interest in the Mill site’s layers of cultural objects is apparent in the materials themselves: carbon paper traced onto foolscap, a nod to school culture. Both series of works involve a rough sort of excavation of a historical (sub)cultural moment, a collection of the stuff of suburban memory.

The photomontage series, *Millers* (Figs 3 and 13) plays at mythmaking through the rather irreverent poaching and re-composition of contradictory images. “Photomontage (...) has a history of being an effective ‘aesthetic political technique’ which (...) often exposed the role of photography in constructing false truths or apparent facts” (Stoops, 58). This particular riff on the photomontage tradition uses Photoshop to create ‘realistic’ spaces with an irreverent twist: images of BC heritage doctored to include anachronistic elements of the Mill history, youth placed out of context, skateboarders infiltrating the black-and-white world of historical ‘truth’.



Fig 12. *Untitled (boys)* (from the series, *Simpsons-Searies*), 2010  
Acrylic and carbon trace on foolscap  
8 x 13 in.  
Used by permission of the artist.

Fig 13. *Logride* (from the series *Millers*), 2011-2012  
Digital photomontage  
415 x 550 pixels (print dimensions variable)  
Used by permission of the artist.



## SUBVERSIONS//

### Furniture constructions, Collage combines

#### Skate or DIY <sup>7</sup>

In the early eighties, skateboarding's plummeting popularity and the closure of the majority of the skateparks led the remaining skateboarders back to the streets, and into their backyards. If the seventies was the era of the concrete skatepark, the eighties was the DIY ramp age: suburban skatopias, purpose-built environments. The detritus of the everyday became material for ad-hoc constructions and bric-a-brac contraptions: a piece of plywood leaning against a wall and a piece of PVC tubing screwed to a couple of two-by-fours became a DIY skatepark. The creation of built environments is intrinsic to the practice of skateboarding. As Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts curator Alex Baker states in his essay, "Transforming Terrains"<sup>8</sup>, skateboarding is "a subculture defined by its relationship to its environment" (133) and is "linked to designing and building structures for skateboarding" (129). The furniture pieces – *Untitled (as-is)* (Fig 14) and *Untitled (form)* (Fig 6) – are a response to found materials, their creation led by an impulse to construct objects that subvert known function; they are a series of connotative convolutions, fueled by DIY skateboarding experiences. What interests me is the multiplicity of ways an object may be adopted, used, transformed – what de Certeau calls the "secondary production (...) hidden in the process of its utilization" (Practice, xii).

<sup>7</sup> I must confess that I lifted this beautiful play on words directly from a regular feature in the skateboard culture quarterly, *Color*.

<sup>8</sup> Baker's essay accompanied the critically acclaimed exhibit *Beautiful Losers: contemporary art and street culture*, and presents his perspective on the "performative and the transformative" (129) aspects of skateboard culture, specifically on the nature of skateboarders' continued interaction with the built environment.



(Left) Fig 14. *Untitled (as-is)*, 2011  
Furniture materials  
144 x 48 x 30 in.  
Photo: Bruce Emmett.  
Used by permission of the artist.

(Below) Fig 15. *Reconstruction of Untitled (as-is)*,  
West Vancouver Museum, 2012.  
Photo: Bruce Emmett.  
Used by permission of the artist.

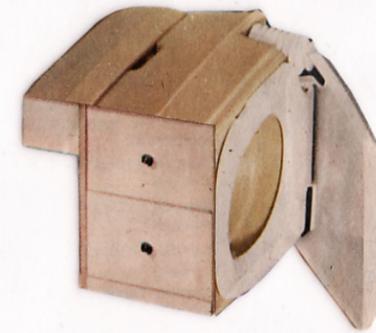


Fig 16. *Object 1* (from the series, *Reddimaid*), 2011  
Collage on vellum  
8.5 x 11 in.  
Used by permission of the artist.

During a conversation with Ben Reeves in April, 2012, he pointed to a curious shift in the signification of this work when he saw some images of the (re)construction of *Untitled (as-is)*. The piece had been disassembled into modular sections in the summer of 2011 and was in the process of assembly for an exhibit in 2012 (Fig 15). For Reeves, the images of its reassembly significantly altered the reading of the object: no longer was there any connotation of an incidental, or coincidental object. Reeves noted that the hybrid had become the new proposition – as he put it (paraphrasing Barthes), "the forms and materials have forgotten their history". The object has jumped a semiological gap, and has renewed signification. As Robert S. Nelson states: "Appropriation, like myth, (...) is a distortion, not a negation of the prior semiotic assemblage. When successful, it maintains but shifts the former connotations to create the new sign and accomplishes all this covertly, making the process appear ordinary or natural" (163-4).

The furniture pieces rely on connotation as their central communicative device. So too the *Reddimaid* works, fabricated from fragments of images of objects (home furnishings, appliances, etc.) poached from the aforementioned Sears catalogue (Fig 16). The objects read as propositions for hybrid products, again with the function arrested – each shifted on its axis in a Duchampian gesture, rejecting its previous life, hinting at another.



**Fig 17. Penetration: GPR, 2012**  
**GPR in action:**  
 Filmmakers Ethan Miller and George Faulkner with Inglewood “Mill” Skatepark designer Monty Little. Photo: Bruce Emmett. Used by permission of the artist.

## SUBURBAN ACTION// Penetration, Inglewood, Survey, Fluge

### Artistic action

This essay has focused primarily on the bricolage of material production. I am, however, also interested in creating situations for artistic action. I recognize that implicit in this sort of gesture, especially when one enters the public sphere, the work resides in the realm of the social, and it is in that space that artists may in fact be “proclaiming and pursuing certain political and social goals”, quoting critic and media theorist, Boris Groys (Frieze). There is a tacit political statement in addressing the Mill site’s (sub)cultural property, where the project is challenging the rights of “ownership” of the buried skatepark.<sup>9</sup>

On Saturday, April 21, 2012, artistic action occurred on the Mill site when I arranged for Burnaby-based Terraprobe Geoscience Corporation to complete a survey of the buried skatepark using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). Along with

Dave Warkentin, the owner of Terraprobe, and two of his physicist/technicians, present were filmmakers Ethan Miller and George Faulkner, who are four years into a documentary of Canadian skateboarding. Rounding out the group was Monty Little – the park’s original designer and the person responsible for the park’s construction in 1977 (Fig 17, 18).

In some ways this resembles Mark Dion’s *Tate Thames Dig*, and his bold appropriations of methodologies outside of the traditional art practice, his use of “intuitive quasi-archaeological techniques” (Coles, 60). Dion created a gathering of people for the purpose of discovery and interpretation, digging through the fragments of the recent and not-so-recent pasts, where the active participation of the volunteers and the curious public was as much a part of the piece as the resulting objects presented in the Tate.

### Probing deeper

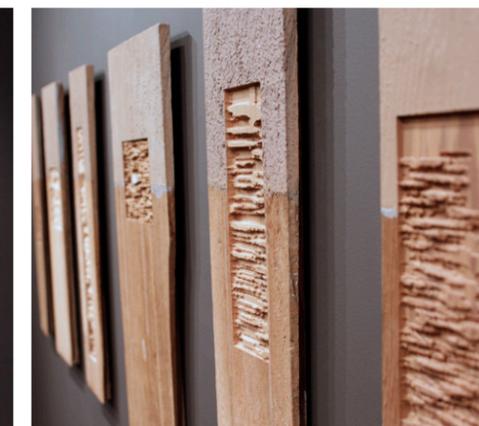
Back again to the politics afoot in the Mill Project: Here’s the story of a site with a (sub)cultural heritage, of a skateboard community that has developed a (sub)cultural foothold and the cultural capital that may place it in a position to retake the site. It is apparent that a number of parties have an investment in the skatepark, and its resurrection. The park’s physical excavation is indeed the ultimate goal, but in the meantime I continue to engage with the material (historical, physical), to interpret the forms (histories, data, what-have-you), and to generate artistic propositions.

The first ‘gallery’ work to emerge out of the GPR scan is the ‘shingles piece’, *Dual Penetration: GPR and CNC* (Fig 19). The data collected by the scanner was translated into a ‘time slice’ or ‘depth slice’, compositing a series of radar images of the buried skatepark. I selected cropped segments of the depth slice image, which were then inscribed into seven shingles from the Vinson House, an early West Vancouver home (built 1913), the former residence of the first Reeve of West Vancouver, and the current residence of Carol Howie, archivist at the West Vancouver Museum and Archives. The shingle cuts were performed by a CNC (Computer Numerical Control) router, and inscribed to a penetration depth of 6mm. I was intrigued to explore these various methods of removing, exposing, peeling back layers, playing with ideas around the cut, using devices to imitate and mediate the act of ‘digging’.

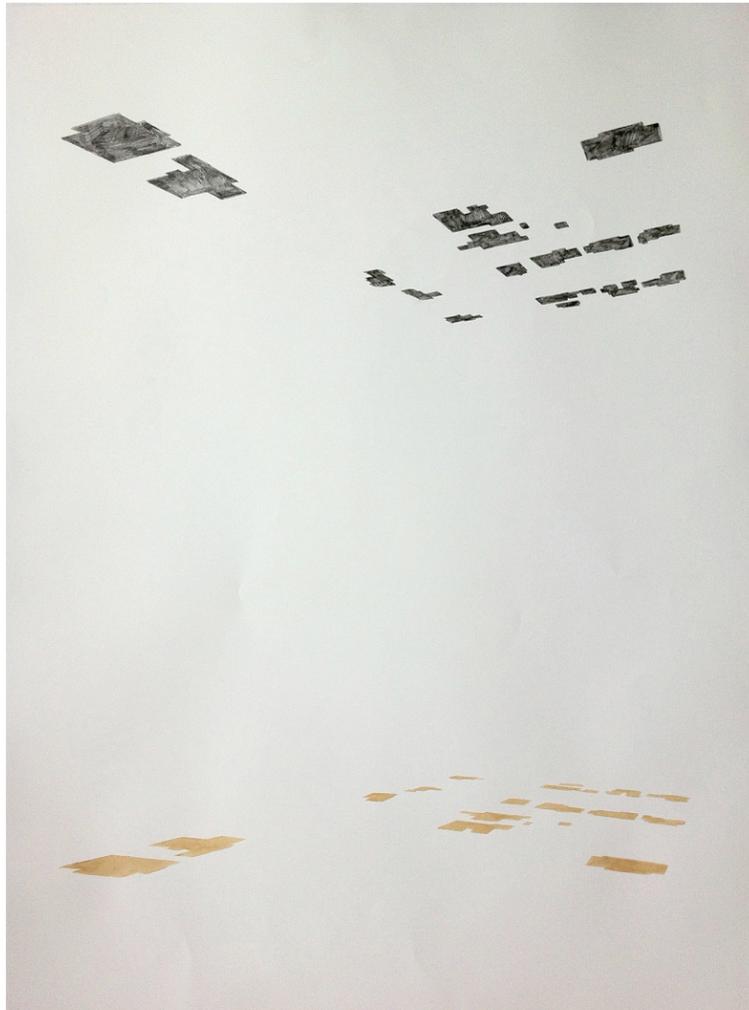


**Fig 18. Penetration: GPR, 2012**  
**GPR in action:**  
 Terraprobe’s Terry Wong with Inglewood “Mill” Skatepark designer Monty Little. Photo: Bruce Emmett. Used by permission of the artist.

**Fig 19. Dual Penetration: GPR and CNC, 2012**  
 Cedar shingles  
 (From the Vinson house, West Vancouver, 1913)  
 Approx. 18 in. tall each. Widths variable.  
 Photo: Bruce Emmett. Used by permission of the artist.



<sup>9</sup>It needs to be understood that I am speaking here in terms of a settler culture, a colonial heritage. The Mill site rests on unceded Coast Salish land, occupied historically by the Squamish First Nation, who are currently negotiating a treaty under the BC Treaty Process with a Statement of Intent submitted in 1993 (BC Treaty Commission, <http://bctreaty.net/soi/soisquamish.php>). While I recognize the richness of the culture of our indigenous peoples, given the time constraints of this degree, the role of the Squamish Nation in the Mill site’s history will not be discussed within the scope of this project. Rather, I intend to engage with the contestation of this space from a subcultural perspective, standing in opposition to the dominant (settler) cultural heritage.



**Fig 20. Inglewood, 2012**  
Earl Grey tea and graphite on paper  
30 x 22 in.  
Photo: Bruce Emmett.  
Used by permission of the artist.

### Surveying suburbia//Mapping and collection

The suburbs works address notions of mapping, of gathering a repertory of spaces, and their subsequent recomposition, or rearrangement. Architectural historian Iain Borden speaks of sites “colonized by skateboarders, who sought to create their own isolated territories, known and accessible to a carefully controlled group” (City, 51).

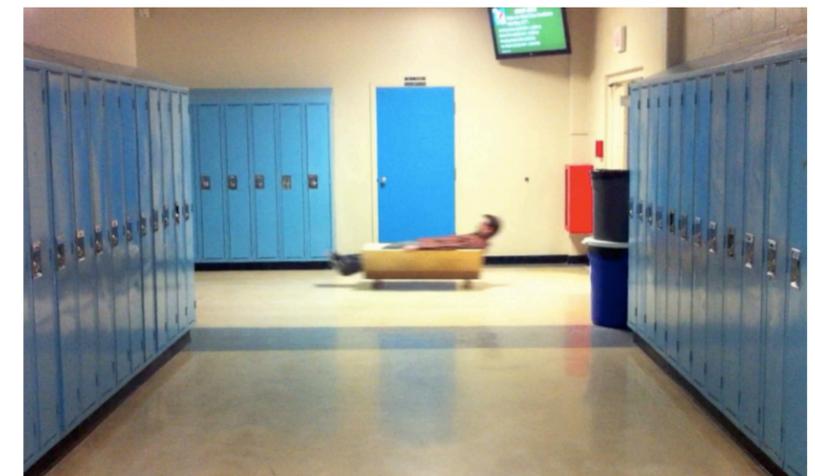
In *Inglewood* one can infer an interest in a form of mapping or charting places, the resulting work a rendering of a space that poaches upon the visual vocabulary of cartography and architecture (Fig 20). Here I have taken a section of the Inglewood neighbourhood in West Vancouver and directly traced (mapped and inscribed) an image of the subdivision from Google Maps, the image intimating a sort of stratified layering, the scale and point of view placing the viewer in the centre, caught in the middle of a proposed space. The work riffs on the historiography of the Mill site, the image’s multiple layers a rather obvious play on the site’s layers of history, the use of tea as a medium a whimsical reference to West Vancouver’s colonial roots.

Another piece, *Survey*, does deal in a far more direct way with the act of mapping or charting (Fig 21). Here I have ‘graffitied’ a series of marks directly over top of the site of the buried skatepark, using spray field lining chalk. I sourced the shapes and figures from roadwork markings that I documented photographically over the course of about a year. I then recomposed the markings, approximating the two bowls and the dual snake run, using the original drawings of the park as reference. To the passerby, the marks appear to be an ostensibly meaningless set of configurations, left open for interpretation: a proposed archaeological excavation, or maybe plans for landscaping, possibly a game of alien hopscotch, or some kind of arborist graffiti. This is the ‘potential space’ that Anthony Kiendl speaks of in *Godzilla vs Skateboarders*, the open cultural space that exists between viewer and object (21, 34).



**Fig 21. Survey, 2012**  
Spray chalk, dimensions variable.  
Photo: Isaac Vanderhorst.  
Used by permission of the artist.

Iain Borden’s (sub)cultural commentary engages with the ways that “the tactics of appropriation, colonization, and identity formation helped skateboarders to redefine both the city and themselves” (53). Skateboarders are defined by the spaces they inhabit and their performative actions within those spaces. In the video, *Fluge*, a figure lying in a wooden v-shaped structure mounted on skateboard trucks and wheels rolls through a high school (Fig 22). The film runs in a loop, with a soundtrack appropriated from the 1977 film *Skateboard Sculpture* (a film which documents the construction of the Inglewood ‘Mill’ Skatepark). As part of its spatial tactics, the practice of skateboarding involves an ongoing reconnaissance of spaces. In *Fluge*, the viewer is taken through a series of schoolrooms and hallways, the spaces activated and ‘colonized’ by the introduction of this alien contraption into the school environment. The fluge, or ‘flume-luge’, is an object of industry subverted into an instrument for leisure or play. It not only mimics an amusement park ‘log ride’, but also references a form of skateboarding called luge or ‘coffin’ skating, where one lies down on the board, and ‘bombs the hill’ (rolls down at great velocity).



**Fig 22. Fluge, 2012**  
Digital video with sound.  
1 min 17 sec loop.  
Used by permission of the artist.  
**In PDF format, click on image for video.**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aA8zW9y-Sh8>

## Rejected

The Mill story is a collage of histories, of appropriations and subversions, of pasts purposefully remembered and intentionally forgotten. The shingle mill's saws stopped spinning and quit cutting in 1926, and for years after, the abandoned log flumes remained in place, adding to the hills of the North Shore a playground of serpentine waterslides (Fig 22). A similar scene arose years later, albeit in a darker and possibly more dangerous fashion. In the early 1980s, skateboarding's popularity hit an all-time low, and the all but abandoned skatepark had fallen into disrepair, reduced to a site for rowdy weekend parties. The decision to have the park "filled and seeded" is cited in the District of West Vancouver Parks and Recreation minutes for February 7, 1984, noting the park's dangerous condition and the fact that the park is "...not always (used) for the purpose for which it was designed" (WVan Archives). The park's legend is equal parts glorious and tragic: balancing the stories of stoked youth participating in the most radical sport in North America are the stories of burning tires rolling down its curved walls, beer bottles smashed at the bottom of the bowl, the park's less-than-smooth transition into a teenage wasteland.



Fig. 23. Children on a flume on the site of the Old Mill  
Courtesy of West Vancouver Archives.



## SECTION 4// ROLLING OUT (OUTRO)

Fig. 24  
Photo: Bruce Emmett.  
Used by permission of the artist.

### (Never say) Last run//\*

#### Re: production

This project explores a way of reading the world around us and investigates the multiplicity of operations with which we gather, collect, and 'translate' personal experiences and shared histories. Hawkes speaks of the individual observer creating his world, that "the true nature of things may be said to lie not in things themselves, but in the relationships we construct, and then perceive, between them" (17). Borden addresses this when he states "(w)e can begin to delineate a kind of architectural history which does not focus on things, effects, production, authorship or exchange, but upon process, possibilities, reproduction, performance and use" (265). We are reminded of de Certeau, of spaces produced through use, of space as practiced place. It is through their consumption and use (not the maker's intended purpose, or defined function) that the meaning of objects and spaces is revealed.

#### Re:collection + Re:interpretation

I have approached the research for this project like a subcultural archaeological 'dig', unearthing the layers of the Mill site's recent history, generating a disparate collection of objects and images. Nicolas Bourriaud claims that in order "(t)o understand the present means carrying out a kind of rough-and-ready archaeological investigation of world culture, which proceeds just as well through re-enactments as through presentation of artifacts – or again, through the technique of mixing" (Altermodern, 5). Through a series of improvised archaeological activities, I have surveyed the territory, generated a collection of objects ad-hoc, then, using a blend of 'mixing' strategies (montage/assemblage/detourage) which I refer to simply as bricolage, I have presented my findings. This bricolage gesture has been an attempt to apprehend the multiplicity of moments that fragment and slice through the Mill site's histories. The Mill Project explores our present relationship to the past, and more than an attempt to unearth a collection of relics, or narratives, or personal histories, the work proposes an opportunity for alternate readings, producing spaces for interpretation.

\* You never call "last run". Never. Just like you never say "watch this" or "one more try". You're just begging for disaster. It sounds like superstition, but I've witnessed first hand (and head, and knee, and ankle) far too much pain as a result of those foolhardy ejaculations. So while this section of the essay appears to be a 'conclusion', this is definitely not my last run.



Fig 25. Bruce Emmett, *The Mill Project*, 2012  
Installation view  
Photo courtesy of the West Vancouver Museum  
Used by permission.

## Here + There and back again//A reflection\*

*The nearest concrete skatepark was a two-hour bus ride, so when Billy and I, and a handful of friends would make the journey out from the suburbs, we would get up bright and early and make a day of it, hopping on the bus in front of the 7-11 at 7. The ride out was spent in quiet anticipation: fingers crossed that the park was dry, excited for the possibility to have the park practically to ourselves before the midday crowds arrived, and nervous knowing that when you get a day at the park, you're going to need to take advantage of the opportunity, and start filling your bag with tricks.*

*The ride home was a different affair: tired and beaten boys giddy from exhaustion and sunstroke. An inventory of tricks learned, attempted, aborted. A laundry list of injuries and wipeouts. There was a general taste of satisfaction, of accomplishment, and a tacit knowledge that we were part of something... Real.*

On May 8, 2012, *The Mill Project* opened at the West Vancouver Museum. Within the confines of the mannered<sup>10</sup> space of the WVM, the rambling, disparate collection of work that resulted over the past two years, all of the playful and irreverent gestures and propositions, whimsical historical reimaginings and fictions<sup>11</sup> – this bricolage – was presented as a cohesive body of work. There I was responding to, and in dialogue with the physical, historical, and social space of the West Vancouver Museum and its built-in set of codes and ideologies.

\* The reflective chapter (subsection) was written in August/September, 2012, two months after the initial submission of the thesis paper in the spring of 2012, and following both the exhibit of *The Mill Project* at the West Vancouver Museum, and the Low-Residency MAA Graduate exhibition, *Here + There*. It was recognized by the ECUAD Faculty of Graduate Studies that the delivery of the Low-Residency Program offers the Graduate Candidates an opportunity for a period of reflection in the interim between our final intensive and final exhibit in the summer, and the submission of our thesis and final thesis review in the fall.

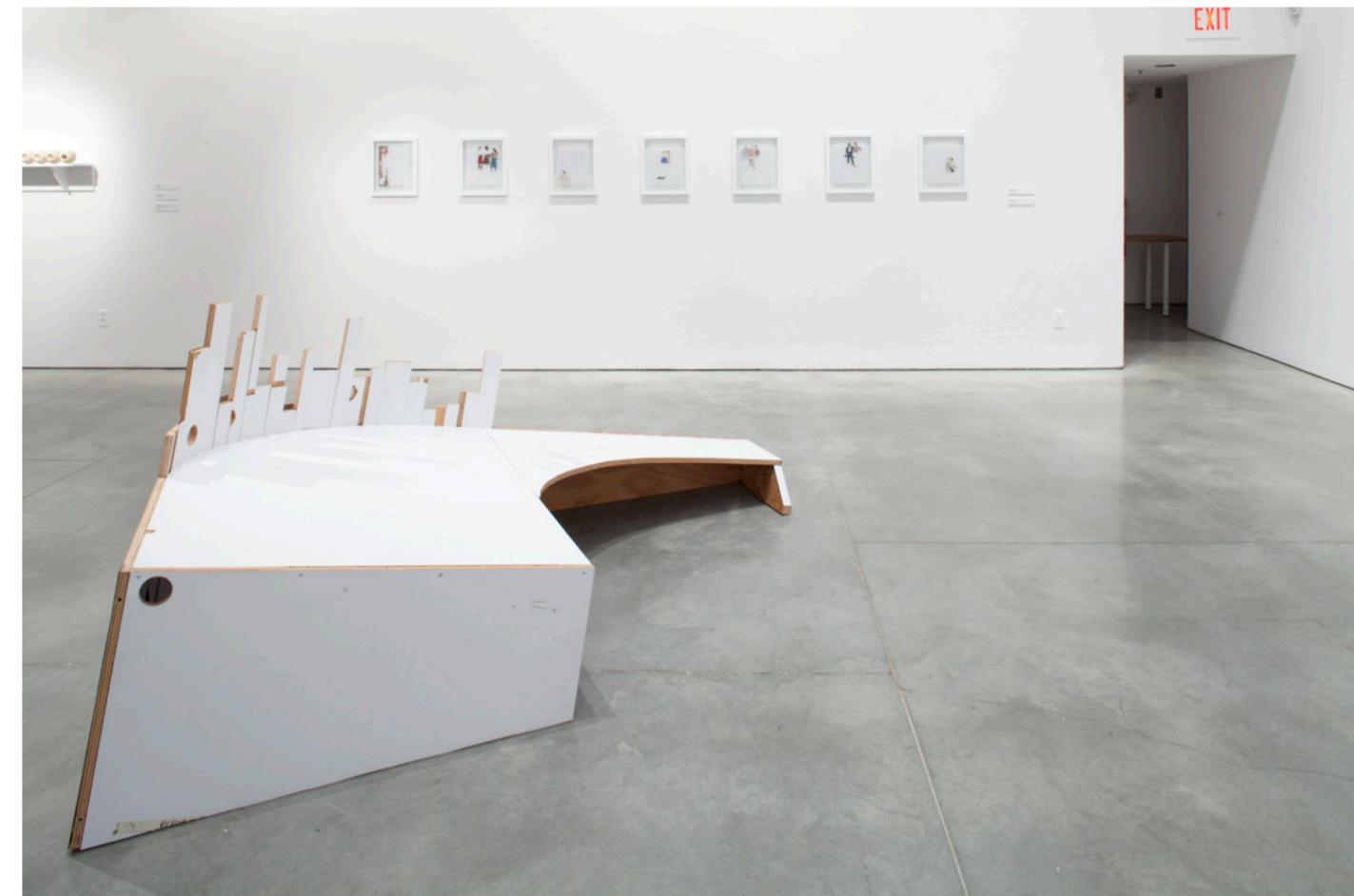
<sup>10</sup> This was a term used by Randy Lee Cutler, in reference to the opening night of *The Mill Project*, West Vancouver Museum, May 8, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> 'Fictions' was a term used by VAG curator and ECUAD instructor, Bruce Grenville, to describe the photomontage series, *Millers*.

On July 19, 2012, I exhibited a selection of these works in the Charles H. Scott Gallery as part of Emily Carr University's Low-Residency MAA Graduate show, *Here + There*. Here I was forced to reconsider the individual artworks: the placement, reception, and 'meaning' outside of the context of this thing called *The Mill Project*. The fragmentary approach that the project has taken, this tendency to 'hint at', or to rely on a system of connotation rather than denotation, while intriguing, does have the potential to disengage rather than engage the viewer. If the images are acting as signs, then how should they read, and where should they lead? Here in its new space, the artwork needed to stand alone, to exist comfortably outside of the 'project', and to make some sense in the context of a group show. As Lawrence Grossberg states: "The same text can and often will be located in a number of different contexts; in each, it will function as a different text and it will likely have different relations to and effects on its audience" (54).

I selected seven collage works from the series, *Catalogue*, and a furniture construction piece, *Untitled (form)*, to be exhibited at the Charles H Scott. Both works are exemplary of my central methodological concerns. Simply put: I have an interest in the recombination of everyday forms, particularly those that emanate from a suburban experience. So while skateboard subculture and its relationship to the Mill site's history has in many ways driven this thesis project, at the heart of the production is an interest in quotidian suburban forms, which is reflected in the material and conceptual content of the selected pieces and their associated connotations.

Fig 26. *Here + There*, ECUAD MAA Graduate Exhibit, 2012  
Installation view  
Photo courtesy of Kai Mushens.  
Used by permission.



## Re:vision

The final piece featured in this paper (Fig 27) is an initial material gesture that indicates a subtle shift in the direction of the *Catalogue* series, where I have begun to follow a trajectory not defined by the ‘rules’ of the Mill Project, as in the case of previous *Catalogue* pieces where I limited my selection of images to specific objects mined from memory. Nor is the work simply an inventory or a collection. In these new iterations, I am responding to a set of visual problems established by a direct engagement with the image, and not to a set of associated tenets or a set of ‘problems’ to be solved around the project. These new *Catalogue* pieces not only reveal a curious second-order image, they also reveal a renewed relationship with the material – I am here rethinking the image, responding to it and to the process of collage.

## What’s at skate stake

Mine is an emergent practice, and the notions about bricolage presented in this essay point to a peculiar and complicated understanding of this strategy. I recognize that my practice has a quality that moves quite freely through a range of activities – this skating through areas of knowledge is part and parcel of my notion of bricolage, as I do not limit the term to its material capacity. The term itself is an appropriated one, and in some ways is not fully satisfactory when one considers the scope of activity that surrounds this project. I sense bricolage is a term that may require revisiting and updating in order to capture its broad reach.

The production over the past two years reveals a body of work and a way of thinking about art (a methodology, if you will) that reveals a joy of discovery – a playful appropriation, manipulation, and interpretation of forms. So in all this activity around the thesis, within this space for discovery, a social dimension has emerged, with an inclusive set of artistic actions, and the creation of a potential space for others to participate, to be a part of the discovery. Bricological tendencies have gone beyond the simple recomposition of forms to the gathering of the experiences, interests, and expertise of groups and individuals<sup>12</sup>. Methodologically speaking, it involves a recomposition of my role as artist and of my relationship to the art object. This approach – this rambling expanse of artistic action and production – gathers not only fragments of histories, but also fragments of lives invested in a space and its (sub)cultural artifacts.

(Following two pages, image shown front and back)  
Fig 27. *Untitled (from the series, Catalogue)*, 2012

Collage on vellum  
11 x 8.5 in.

Used by permission of the artist.



<sup>12</sup> There are a remarkable number of interested parties willing to lend support to the project. From skateboarders new and old (including ex-West Van Mill park skateboarders, now in their forties and fifties) to members of the Vancouver Skateboard Coalition, from skatepark designers to geoscience and construction companies, to historians and artists – all are seduced by the prospect of resurrecting, even temporarily, this unique subcultural artifact – West Vancouver’s cool contribution to the growth of subcultures not just in Vancouver, but in Canada at large. However, not everyone desires for the park’s excavation. I heard second hand that local legend PD, of PD’s Hot Shop (the store is a Vancouver institution and the home of Skull Skates) said (here I paraphrase): “Keep it buried, the park was a piece of shit.”



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