DAY FOLDER

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DAY FOLDER
Anderson Gallery mezzanine and Scott House garden, April 19-28, 2013

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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With love and thanks to my amazing classmates, faculty, friends
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Abstract

Provisional or unfinished images, forms and actions can sustain their status by continuing to change. This can resist programmed experience of their state, and shift their relationship as images within time. The sub-aesthetics of the unfinished and entropic can alter our understanding of where and how images are formed and located within time. My paintings each exist within their own emergent systems of time, structure and productive disorder. This thesis discusses these ideas in relation to *DAY FOLDER* and other work made during my MFA studies.
At first glance RPI does not look like a college. To those who have no direct contact with the institution, RPI seems to be swallowed by the city. To those who go there it is an experience, a memory, a vital part of their lives.

The buildings with their cold exteriors hide the true life of the school. They are a barrier to the world outside; this barrier has been a help and a hindrance. The stone faces of the structures hide the flesh faces of the students; the faces that have many different attitudes, shapes, and appearances. Much like a coconut, the meat and heart of the college is hidden from first inspection by an extremely hard shell. Like the coconut, once this shell is broken, the meat and the heart are revealed.¹

This is an extract from the introduction to the 1966 edition of the Cobblestone student yearbook of VCU (then known as RPI). In 2013, it is a reversal of current newspaper headlines bemoaning the University’s aggressive appropriation of space within the Carver and Monroe neighborhoods. This twisting narrative of the institution’s physical presence, scale, and politicized site is further revealed in the substantial archives held by the VCU Cabell Library Special Collections. During research into the history of the mezzanine space and garden, I began thinking of the building’s archive as a form of surface. The archive is a temporal surface and an active surface, of accumulating material and information that becomes a growing and changing interface for considering the site.

¹ Cobblestone, RPI Yearbook, 1966
Meanwhile, I was also thinking about physical and architectural surface. While reading about Gordon Matta-Clark’s work, I came across the term “subjectile”, another word for the surface and support of an artwork. It is the site where an image occurs or action takes place. Much like an archive, it operates as a filter space between subject and object, or surface and action. As its relationship to time is unfixed, the subjectile is temporal.

the subjectile provides a dynamic and mobile support associated with a work, which is both altered and altering. In the various acts of traversal involved in the encounter between someone and that work, an alteration that can bear on both the idea and the form involved. In this way, as neither form nor content, the subjectile exceeds the form idea and is presupposed by it. ²

In studio visits over the last year I’ve been introduced to two key ideas that have influenced my thinking. One is the idea of the sub-aesthetic, and another is object-oriented ontology. The sub-aesthetic is an aesthetic with unstable value that can transgress normative ways of seeing³. In my work, peeling paint, the mark of the paint roller and spray gun all present an aesthetic valued outside of conventional fine art mark making. The mark making of both tools is often provisional, indeterminate or unfinished. They both have associations with industrial contexts, and the application or coverage of graffiti. At the same time, they more recently inhabit a mixed value zone where their use by artists like Jessica Stockholder, Katarina Grosse, Tauba Auerbach, and Wendy White (to name a few) has repositioned them within the fine art system of value. It is now a semi-recuperated sub-aesthetic.

VCU Cabell Library stairwell work, cream and mauve paint applied with roller, 2011. At arms length, partially peeled latex on wall with other preexisting peeled paint, Art Six Gallery, Richmond, 2012.

² Walker, Stephen, Gordon Matta Clark: Art, Architecture and the Attack on Modernism, Pg 168
Thinking about sub-aesthetics has helped me articulate how my work creates and references active sub-aesthetic languages, like the languages of trace, spillage, stain, and process. This is something I have previously described as “incidental” mark making, forms, or colour within my work. These often occur as gestures or marks that emerge from processes that are incidental to a particular action or outcome, or the analytic mimicry of these found forms. And it also includes the use of colours that are not necessarily found directly in an observed or ‘local’ source, or in conceptual relation to an idea, site, or action. They are a sub-aesthetic to more dominant or formalized aesthetics that are clearly identified in relation to an outcome or to a specific site.


The sub aesthetic can also be thought of in relation to provisional painting: ‘Auto-iconoclasm. Provisionality inoculates the painting, conveys to us the dissidence of the painter from a prevailing style. Once, not all that long ago, artists could establish their dissidence through the innovative originality of their work, but the avant-garde strategy of rupture, the creation of an iconoclastic work, has become so thoroughly assimilated as to no longer serve as proof of anything more than that the artist is a good student. Perhaps the only time that iconoclasm retains its power is when the icon that is broken is the artist’s very own work. This is what a provisional work can do: demolish its own iconic status before it ever attains such a thing.‘

Five years after the essay “Provisional Painting” appeared in Art in America, the aesthetics and ideas of what is understood as provisionality continues to be critiqued and filter through current visual languages. There seems to have been a shift toward escaping an oversimplified formalization of provisionality by refocusing on provisional

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4 Rubinstein, Raphael, Pg 84, Provisional Painting Part Two, Art in America, February 2012
actions. This allows the provisional to be understood as more conceptually aligned with
dematerialization and performative ways of working. In my work, this also exists within
its relationship to time and the continued action of the work, the image and form of the
work remains provisional because it keeps changing.

The conversation about object-oriented ontology occurred quite recently, and I am only
beginning to read about it. So far, I understand it to be a way of reconceiving subjective
and objective divisions within existence. A subject-oriented perspective conventionally
privileges human perception. An object-oriented perspective reaffirms that objects are
independent of subjective relations, or any relation outside of themselves. This way of
thinking critiques the distortions involved in subjective understandings

Sprayed Sheep, Wharariki Beach, South Island, Aotearoa, New Zealand, 2012

Object-oriented ontology can also be discussed in relation to the subjectile, surface, and
support. The subjectile is the site of the conventional figure/ground relationship, with the
ground often perceived as operating as an objective space, and the figuration as the
subjective interplay of representation. The ground and subjectile are also a site for “the
abyss”, a “groundless ground” or a “bottomless bottom”⁵, another place where the
subject and object become less defined.

On another form of ground, in the mid-1980s I undertook a series of land art projects
with my brother, carried out over the course of a year or two. I was five years old, he
wasn’t much older, and we had a lot of spare time. We were fairly determined to dig to
the other side of the world, though we had some understanding that this was a
somewhat fictional endeavor, and that we would remain stuck on the surface.

⁵ Marder, Michael, pg 126, The Event and the Thing, The University of Toronto Press, 2009
Productive entropy and active ruin

The peeled paintings become sites of productive entropy⁶ and active ruin. Productive entropy is a state of disorder in a system or structure. But it is not a dead-end disorder; it produces changes, reductions or additions within the system or structure. In an artwork this can exist materially, formally, and conceptually. In my peeled paintings it exists as changes within the surface and image of the painting, reductions, erasures, relief, reproduction, layers, and the resulting detached peels of paint. These are physical and visual manifestations of disorder within the initial formal structure and system of the painted surface. Conceptually, this entropy shifts the way the work inhabits space, its status within the space, and the emotional and phenomenological response it provokes when encountered by the viewer at different points in its duration.

The nature of temporality is likewise affected by entropy, described as either static, cold, and lethargic, or dissipate in its chronological unfolding.⁷

The term active ruin is often used to discuss abandoned urban and industrial sites that remain active and habitable without necessarily legitimate or fixed use. They exist in a process of entropy that may or may not involve further human adaptation of the structure. It is an idea applied to architectural space and site, not usually to an artwork or culturally produced thing. The culturally produced ruin-thing might usually be described as folly or some form of faux ruin, or simply as an art object that has been neglected or lost its value.

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⁶ My understanding of entropy is informed by reading discussions of entropy in the work of Eva Hesse, Robert Smithson, Gordon Matta-Clark, and others.

⁷ Lee, Pamela M. Pg 39, Object to be Destroyed: The work of Gordon Matta-Clark
As active ruins, the peeled wall paintings are somewhat self-producing and potentially ongoing. Their systems as paintings involve multiple and divisible layers that can produce discrete peels. Often made with rejected paint colours from the local Lowes store, they are waste material and they produce waste material. They also contain an excess of labour within the nonsensical procedure that involves seven to ten coats of paint within each layer of peel. I have a collection of shedded “skins” or “hides” that are produced by the work, and am thinking through how they can exist as art objects. These resulting ephemera become objects only once in this wasted or excess form, and it feels like their status as art objects needs to engage this idea further. In a fairly obvious way the paint is much like skin is as an organ; not an organ that has clearly autonomous form, until detached. It is a functioning part of the inside, but inside out.

The Anderson Gallery mezzanine space, and the garden of the adjacent Scott House, are both currently leftover and slightly wasted spaces. Leftover from other times, the mezzanine was built for toilets and a nondescript room behind the then library stacks room. The garden is an outdoor space that seems located in a past time when it was a key hub for students flowing between the main administration building and the then library. They are both still active sites, yet somehow in my experience of them, they seem to be emptying of the contemporary. The mezzanine is a part of the gallery that is not often used for showing work, the garden does not contain furniture that invites dwelling, and its landscaped pavers lead in a dead end fork to nowhere. Both the
mezzanine and garden are ripe for some form of productive entropy. If they were paid just a little less attention, they would fill with cobwebs (I found four cobwebs during installation), or overgrow for want of foot traffic in the fecund Richmond summer.

`DAY FOLDER, (detail), latex paint and peeled latex paint on floor, walls, and ceiling. VCU Arts Thesis Show, Anderson Gallery mezzanine space, April 2013`

‘the bond between non-place and the ruin raises the question regarding the pleasure we feel in transgressing linearity.’

As a site, there are different versions of the Anderson Gallery space available to me. There is the space I can stand in right now. And then there are past images of that space that I can look at. There are also the future images of that space, which have not yet been produced, but can be imagined or perhaps do already exist within an administrative plan. I looked at architectural plans, rehab plans, and institutional documents like the college’s annual bulletins, and student yearbooks. These archives go back to 1917 when VCU began as a community initiative called the Richmond School of Social Economy, with a mandate to address the social and health concerns of urban life.

Over the course of several visits, I came to these documents in chronological order, and sometimes in a more selective or random order. I felt like my understanding of the garden space and the small room upstairs was expanding. I scanned strings of images,

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8 Ginsberg, Robert, Pg 189 Transgressing Place, The Aesthetics of Ruins.
9 Hibbs, Henry, Pg 14, History of the Richmond Professional Institute, VCU Libraries Special Collections online http://dig.library.vcu.edu/cdm/printview/collection/rpi/id/167/type/compoundobject/show/0/popts/all
some are interesting for their own moment in time, others gained relevance when thought of in relation to the current space and time. From digging in the archive, I found out physical, somewhat obvious yet invisible things about the space, for example, I know that inside and behind the walls there are steel supports that are coated in red lead and that the stone is an alberene soapstone. Thinking of the site through this selective and incomplete surface of archive, I approached working in these spaces as a historical site, a contemporary site, and a future site. This research also created a viewpoint of the site that is almost transparent, an interior view or an inside out view. Initially, I’d thought I would present a small fold-out publication that brought together images from the archive with photographs of the work in the mezzanine. I produced two versions of this, but both of them felt like an accessory, or some kind of souvenir. And so, during the thesis exhibition the relationship between this research and the work remains unseen, but also somehow invisible because they are inseparable.

Like a site, artworks continue to produce meaning at multiple points; while they’re conceived, produced, and occupied or received. And so this production of meaning is also their own material production, it folds together. I do things and make things with shifting weights of intuition and analysis, and I’m often thinking about where meaning is produced within these processes. And then which parts of the processes need to be retained in the visible or conceptual surface of the work itself. I also think a lot about different forms and values of meaning within the structure of the work; where irrational meaning might exist at the same time as a rational meaning, and where the two might mix. For example, there is a tension created in the rationality of reading a work as a formalized autonomous composition, and then reading how the same work also breaks those formal boundaries in relation to its site.

‘being at home amongst the ruins means recognizing the reciprocity between objective temporality and subjective consciousness, and hence between ontology and aesthetics’

10 “Irrational” is not intended as a pejorative here.

11 Trigg, Dylan, pg 199 The aesthetics of decay, Peter Lang Publishing, 2006
A historic ruin is a fairly understandable image, almost deeply acceptable. A collapse that has obviously occurred today or will occur tomorrow is far more disturbing. It carries another kind of alert, an alert to an indeterminate event and time signature. I often make temporary and negotiated interventions that change over time, either through their exposure, or through further action on my part. For example, a floor painting will gather visible footprints and dust. Or it might be cut and stretched upward or outward to create another form. My approach to the work in situ is intuitive and analytical, and made with consideration of what is already present as index of activity, or of imagined use. The forms and colour palette within the work are emergent, they develop from time and process. As part of this development I explore slippages between incidental, found, or subjective gesture and colour.

_The subjectile can be understood to be part of an operation of simultaneous maintenance and undoing_\(^{12}\)

The wall paintings in the mezzanine space use a “peeled” painting technique, visibly disrupting the surface structure of the architecture. Peeled sheets of latex paint remain

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integrated with the architectural support, but I disrupt or reconfigure their relationship with that structure. The paint becomes a flexible and skin-like membrane, more obviously subject to the physical forces of gravity, elasticity, and light. As an aesthetic intervention the work can operate as a ‘sub-aesthetic’ of layered entropy.

The colour palette used in *DAY FOLDER* is a response to the preexisting and ambient lighting of the mezzanine space. The dark green colour feels theatrical or staged, and out of place, it is not ‘of’ the space. The lighting of the space is not designed or appropriate for dark absorbent colours. This shift in the locational belonging or embeddedness of colour, also signifies a shift in the time signature of the work; the space isn’t quite night or day. It is not of the moment of the space as aligned with its surroundings. Its alien element (the colour palette and rejection/absorption of light) is off key, off the moment, from another time, place or narrative. It is an event outside of the event of being in the space.

*DAY FOLDER, (detail),* latex paint and peeled latex paint on floor, walls, and ceiling. VCU Arts Thesis Show, Anderson Gallery mezzanine space, April 2013

There is predictability to the way in which the Anderson mezzanine physically herds and channels people through its space, but it also has an unpredictable intimacy for someone unfamiliar with the size of the room that it herds you into. This unfamiliarity provokes an examination of the space; it is hard to walk into that room and not look at every surface. In this way it becomes a site for exploration, and the work itself explores the surfaces of the space indiscriminately.

In studio work and work made in the Fine Arts Building, I have investigated the tension between work that operates more autonomously on a wall or in space, and work that integrates itself into site with less independence from the architectural frame and
features of the space. By formalizing the structure of the work, it operates more directly in conversation with the conventions of painting as object or visual field within space. This investigation of autonomy and integration is something I want to continue.

Untitled, partially peeled latex paint on floor, second and third images show the same area of paint cut and partially peeled to loop around existing lighting frame.

Room 307 (detail), digital photographic print of painted floor adhered flat to wall, Room 307 (detail), partially peeled paint on floor.

Recently I have been working with photography to generate images within the process of installation. I am interested in how these moments of image can foresee and generate parts of the future work, while also interrogating the viewer’s understanding of a fixed state for the work. By framing the artwork in different physical states, the photographs ask questions about the time-based qualities of the activity of painting on site. The intention for the thesis show work was that it would continue to change over the course of the exhibition, with photography used to capture images from these changes. However, this was not as rich an investigation as I would have liked. Following from the thesis work, I would like to gain occupy a site for several months, or longer, and undertake this idea with a real sense of duration.
Camouflage, partially peeled latex on wall, 2013

By breaching a temporal narrative, the ruin becomes an anomaly. Neither fulfilling an objective of the present, nor maintaining a clear aspect of the past, the ruin instead occupies a temporal halfway house. Whereas historic ruins affirm the identity of the present, contemporary ruins appear to detract from such an identity. Pg 184 Aesthetics of Decay

**Alien architecture**

‘Surfaces are where architecture gets close to turning into something else and therefore exactly where it becomes vulnerable and full of potential. When Lucio Fontana slashed through the surface of painting to create spatial ambiences, or when Matta-Clark sliced through the membranes of building to create a still contested category of work, the multiple ontologies that potentially coexist in the surface –architecture- become evident.’

A wall is often a shallow and hollow placeholder, a slice between two other spaces. Architecture isn’t an object, and half peeled paint isn’t an object. Half peeled paint is really a kind of half object, half surface. The peel is half architectural surface and half shedded material, which is where it almost becomes an object or a thing. Currently, our relationship to architecture is changing with our digital viewpoint. Regardless of the fact that we’re already viewing something on a screen, the shift in scale and perspective provided by software like Google Earth and Sketch-up allow us to escape some of the experiential phenomena of architectural space, and treat architecture more like object.

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The paintings on the walls, floor, and ceiling of the mezzanine space attempt to make images as projections rather than compositions. I tried to let their form happen all at once but over time. Which doesn’t make much sense, but is interesting to think about. It is more like the way light operates all at once and over time, which is one reason why the term projection seems appropriate. These works reference existing light and shadow within the space, but also throw in other imaginary light and shadow. The combination of projection and peel is both unstable and ephemeral. The spray gun is also another form of projection, the structure of its mark making is not composed in relation to a network or accumulation forms. It is more like one form all at once. The spray gun is a form of throwing colour, and as discussed in relation to Katarina Grosse’s work, it creates distance between the artist and the surface.

The dominant colour used in DAY FOLDER refuses to reflect light. It is a flat finish paint in a cool dark green that absorbs much of the light present in the space during its lowest lighting conditions. It forces the surface to become even less of an object than architecture ordinarily is. It creates the illusion that the surface is in fact space. The areas in the surface that are white are not actually painted with additional white, they are the white of the wall before any intervention was made, these areas of white wall are partially obscured by a haze of pigment dust from the deep green colour that surrounds

.DAY FOLDER (detail), VCU Arts Thesis Show, Anderson Gallery mezzanine, April 2013
them, and they sit behind layers of a slightly milky transparent acrylic polymer that suspends the dust within its layers. By using the paint sprayer to surround areas of negative space within the wall I was attempting to project depth into the surface of the wall, and complicate the reading of figure and ground within the painted surface.

The confusion between the work’s status as theatrical painted image versus integrated installation is something I am continuing to think about. This middle ground that the painting inhabits contributes to its theatricality and sense of provisional integration. The paint feels slapped on, because it was slapped on.

 Against philosophies that regard the surface as formal or sterile and grant causal power only to shadowy depths, we must defend the opposite view: discrete, autonomous form lies only in the depths, while dramatic power and interaction float along the surface.  

**DAY FOLDER, (detail)**, latex paint and peeled latex paint on floor, walls, and ceiling. VCU Arts Thesis Show, Anderson Gallery mezzanine space, April 2013

In a seminar held a VCU this semester, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev presented the question of what it means that dust turns to clay. In discussion of this question, the moon was mentioned as a thing that is the result of dust, an accumulation of exploded matter that melded into the moon. It can also be discussed as an object, an object that is empirically experienced only because it reflects the light of the sun. Like any other object that cannot be immediately touched, it can usually only be seen. And can only be seen because it reflects light.

The idea of “black boxing” was also discussed during the seminar. This is the idea that our current tools of communicative technology are made in a way that obscures their material structure and our familiarity with their form and structure. We are discouraged

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14 Harman, Graham, pg 195 On Vicarious Causation, Collapse Volume Two, Urbanomic, 2007
from getting to know their structure by the impenetrable surfaces of their casings. The opacity of their “black boxed” skins. The site of the subjectile of these communicative devices is unseen and to a certain extent inaccessible. We work on an already formed false surface, on top of the true subjectile and site of actual interaction. The keyboard is a pre-prepared figuration. An app or interface provides a predetermined and already limited range of gestural opportunities and actions. And a gestural trajectory and structure, that we navigate with a certain amount of ambivalence or lack of real agency and a sense of inevitability. I heard recently that Apple is gaining copyright for “swiping” gestures, and sensor-ready gestures made in real space in front of computer screens. These actions have a preprogrammed timeframe, and datafied datamined record of the interaction, that somehow replaces the actual subjectile alteration of the maker.

A table outside

There are many photographs of students and faculty gathered outside the Anderson Gallery, in the brick courtyard surrounding the current water fountain, and in the garden just beyond. This was especially common during the time that the building was used as the library, 1937 - 1971. And photos posed for the yearbook are often at this site. Earlier, in the 1920s and 30s, before the courtyard was fully formed, photographs were often posed at the gates. In informal photographs it seems like this area also served as a gathering place similar to the ‘Compass’ area in front of the current Cabell Library.

I had originally intended to create a provisional architectural structure for the garden site, similar in scale to the room on the mezzanine, thinking this could insert an echo of the inside space into the outside space, and vice versa. This changed after I completed a work for a show in New Zealand; The incident with the table, a set of carved picnic tabletops for the courtyard of a gallery space. I realized that the table inserted itself into the courtyard space in a way that I wanted the architectural structure to exist in the garden space. It was a surface that embedded itself into the site, yet also a surface that could be intervened with materially, in the way that painted walls can. The essay Ways to play a table that accompanied The incident with the table follows below, many of the ideas within the essay are also relevant to thinking about the use of public or open space within the institutional setting of the Anderson Gallery and the VCU campus. The picnic table is symbol of provisional community and shared space, it is also attached to
vernacular and egalitarian sub-aesthetic with its functional and pragmatic unitary design. It is a ‘classic’ design in the popular culture sense, inserted into the gardens of the classically influenced Scott House.

Ways to play a table

At some point I narrowed my search terms to ‘picnic table nz’, and came across one swathed in the flow of the 2007 Mt Ruapehu lahar, another standing in the shallows of a calm southern lake, followed by one being overtaken by a violent wave. International search terms yielded a picnic table midstream of a steadily flowing Cumbrian beck, and, strikingly, one with a bear seated politely, waiting to be fed.

Apparently, the bear was photographed sitting outside the US Fish and Wildlife Service office in Kalispell, Montana. Locals reported that the bear arrives daily and waits to be fed by park rangers. The image became a Republican meme. Various captions include ‘Democrat Bear patiently awaits hand-out’, and ‘Bearack Obama’. The meme also spawned a home-schooler-produced children’s book entitled The Fable of Bearack Obama.  

There are fish to catch, berries and nuts to gather, and a den to dig out – but Bearack Obama the Brown Bear soon discovers that the government can do all of those things for him! There is only one problem – the government doesn’t do any of those things as well as Bearack can himself, and he soon finds himself becoming bored, sad, lazy, and unhealthy. It isn’t until he breaks free from dependency on others and relearns the joys of being self-sufficient that he once again is the healthy, happy, and free bear that he was always intended to be. Come join Bearack in this charming and fun story …

An informal survey of US art school students concluded that the meme’s metaphor is an idiotic equation, but it speaks to a particular desperation for freedom and privacy. The wild bear at the picnic table mingles ideas of designated public space, and the provision of public resources, with the freedom and weird sort of privacy that the wilderness provides. The bear is positioned between these conflicting systems of survival. The picnic table becomes a prop and interface between the bear and the rangers. It’s a place where the two might meet and establish their relations; like, what if the bear brought fish to the table? Or simply licked it clean? Or what if the Ranger just shoots a gun in the air?

The ‘Bearack Obama’ meme is commonly confused with another version of itself, the same photo captioned as a politically neutral ‘Patient Bear’. In an online question and answer forum about the origins of the photo, it has also been mistaken for an entirely different photo known as ‘Picnic Table Bear’, a similar bear eating popcorn from a picnic table in California.

![Image](image1.jpg)

_Bearack Obama, unknown photographer and date. Picnic table in the beck, Ulverston, Cumbria, England, 2011, from the blog of Geoff Dellow_

It turned out that the table straddling the Cumbrian stream was in a small town called Ulverston, and was posted on the blog of local resident Geoff Dellow. His blog _Discussing Topics to do with Ulverston_ provides localised discussion about the provision and creation of public space. The posts often focus on the way Geoff, as an individual and as part of a community group, playfully uses and repurposes shared space in the township. These efforts often involve vigorous yet peaceful conflict with the local council, and other members of the community. After a series of disputes about the unauthorised placement of several picnic tables nearby, one table ended up in the stream. Another disgruntled resident threw it there because they didn’t appreciate the congregations of young people the tables attracted.

A weary council staffer responded to the stream incident: _I have been made aware that one of your picnic tables is now in mid stream of The Gill. I also note that you draw attention to it on your blog. This is getting beyond a joke. It needs removing immediately before it becomes an issue with the Environment Agency/Rivers Authority._

A responding spoof comment reads: _Have you thought of talking "With" the Table rather than "To" The Table. Have you asked the table how she "Feels". Maybe she does not want to be a table maybe she wants to be a concert pianist. Maybe she wants a weighty legal document signed upon her! I suggest you have a good chat with her and if she will_ [17]

not move I will talk with Denis Skinner and suggest a Private Members Bill to Facilitate her removal. Dr Benjamin Spock.\textsuperscript{18}

In his book \textit{Building the Unfinished} (1977),\textsuperscript{19} urban theorist Lars Lerup describes a nomadic school child and a nomadic school desk that inhabit the same building, moving from room to room. The student carves their name into the surface of the wooden desk, and at a later time comes across the same desk again and knows it as 'my' desk. Lerup uses this scenario to discuss how relations are made through everyday activity or action. The title of the chapter is 'To Appropriate Things', and deals with the ways in which people appropriate objects and spaces within the process of dwelling, a process that creates habitat without necessarily constructing it. The process of dwelling can be reductive, or involve deconstruction.

Carved trees, Hyde Park, Sydney, 2012

Away from the Internet and Lerup’s book, I found myself standing in Hyde Park, Sydney, before a row of tall straight trees. Each trunk is carved, 360 degrees around, and looks much like the surface of a cliff-side trail to the beach, or some dusty suburban fence. In artworks, gestural marks like these often read as a direct index of human gesture, and sometimes provide a misleading sense of expression. As with these everyday carvings, there is often a slippage between what is an intentionally expressive gesture or form, and an incidental one. The limitations of the drawing tool might produce a vicious looking love heart. In art-making this is further complicated by how easy it is to mimic either the

\textsuperscript{18} http://geoffdellow.blogspot.com/2011/07/this-little-piggy.html.

expressive or the incidental. This results in a sort of appropriation of gesture and form. It meets a need for the object or surface to feel like it holds the index of a particular moment or attitude of human presence.

*The incident with the table* is an invitation for dwelling, and an experiment in the translation of a hand-drawn map of incident and gesture to a machine-cut tabletop surface. The surfaces are made to expect a future process of dwelling that will overwrite the initial score. In the public courtyard of the Waikato Museum the tables face their own challenge, their accessibility is under watch. In order to meet Council imposed Health and Safety regulations the tables are taken inside at the close of the gallery each night. For ease of this nightly maneuver they’ve also been given wheels, which subtly but surely change them as objects. They’re usually ordinary and slightly awkward objects that manage to feel inviting almost anywhere. With wheels they take on another kind of awkward mobility. Almost as if they’re unable to comfortably adjust to being under care of a public art gallery, and perhaps contemplating a run from the complications of this kind of public space. Like the table straddling the stream, these tables are in the midst of a negotiation about the ways in which a public space or object can be accessed and used.

*The incident with the table (detail)*, Waikato Museum Courtyard, March 2013